

**A NEW MODEL FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA LAS VEGAS EDUCATOR EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

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Abstract: Educators and future educators must be a part of the continual career awareness and experience process of students and future students. Teachers need to know how their subjects can add to the employability of their students. This program provides a vehicle for school curriculum to be developed and implemented in all academic disciplines.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explains the Educator Externship Program and its purpose and goals. It addresses the benefits of the program for the educator, the schools and students, and the business community.

What are Educator Externships?

The Educator Externship Program is part of a community career awareness program aimed at better preparing students for the workforce of the 21st century. As a result of these experiences, educators will have new tools to ensure classroom learning experiences are more relevant to what goes on in the “real world.” All students need to know about the world of work. As students gain insight into career options, they will be able to make intelligent decisions regarding their futures and how to make them a reality.

The Externship experience was designed using the SCANS skills. SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) was developed in 1991 by the U.S. Department of Education. These provide a framework from which the Externship was developed and are a part of the skills teachers include in their lesson plans for the Externship and are used as a guide by teachers while participating in the minimum 50 hour on-site work experience. A list of the Three Part Foundations Skills is listed below:

Basic Skills: Reads, writes, performs arithmetic and mathematical operations, listens and speaks

- A. Reading - locates, understands, and interprets written information in prose and in documents such as manuals, graphs, and schedules.
- B. Writing - communicates thoughts, ideas, information, and messages in writing; and creates documents such as letters, directions, manuals, reports, graphs, and flow charts.
- C. Arithmetic/Mathematics - performs basic computations and approaches practical problems by choosing appropriately from a variety of mathematical techniques.
- D. Listening - receives, attends to, interprets, and responds to verbal messages and other cues.
- E. Speaking - organises ideas and communicates orally.

Thinking Skills: Thinks creatively, makes decisions, solves problems, visualises, knows how to learn, and reasons.

- A. Creative Thinking - generates new ideas.
- B. Decision Making - specifies goals and constraints, generates alternatives, considers risks, and evaluates and chooses best alternative.
- C. Problem Solving - recognises problems and devises and implements plan of action.
- D. Seeing Things in the Mind's Eye - organises, and processes symbols, pictures, graphs, objects, and other information.
- E. Knowing How to Learn - uses efficient learning techniques to acquire and apply new knowledge and skills.
- F. Reasoning - discovers a rule or principle underlying the relationship between two or more objects and applies it when solving a problem.

Personal Qualities: Displays responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity and honesty.

- A. Responsibility - exerts a high level of effort and perseveres towards goal attainment.
- B. Self-Esteem - believes in own self-worth and maintains a positive view of self.
- C. Sociability - demonstrates understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy, and politeness in group settings.
- D. Self-Management - assesses self accurately, sets personal goals, monitors progress, and exhibits self-control.
- E. Integrity/Honesty - chooses ethical courses of action.

The Externship is an opportunity for educators to reduce the barriers between the classroom and the workplace by spending a minimum of 50 hours at a business, labour, non-profit organisation, or government agency. These experiences in industry help educators become more informed about the range of career options open to their students and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to excel in the workforce. By working with a business, the educator will gain a new, hands-on perspective of the evolving competencies required in the work world.

During their externships, educators work side-by-side with employees in order to understand their major work responsibilities and the skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to perform effectively. The educators then use this information to connect classroom learning to the workplace and illustrate the relevance of career education to students' futures.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the Educator Externship Program is to have all teachers (Academic and Occupational) understand how what they teach in the classroom relates to the business/industry world. Through a structured, supervised and coordinated experience, educators will be able to enhance their teaching strategies so that their existing curricula will be infused with current and evolving work-relevant skills. As a result of the experience, educators can better communicate to their students the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to enter careers of their choice. This will allow students to see and understand the connection between schoolwork and their future careers.

Benefits

Externship experiences offer educators the chance to participate in self-directed professional development. Teachers are encouraged to enter an industry related to the subject matter they teach in order to develop an increased understanding of the specific skills their students will need in the workplace. Educators learn about the hiring and termination processes of businesses and the technologies at work in different industries. Emerging technologies, including networked computers and web-based technologies, have led to a rapidly changing workplace and teachers, counsellors, and administrators need to understand how these changes will affect students entering the workforce.

A teacher's experience in the workplace can have an impact on an entire classroom full of students. Educators bring this new knowledge back to the classroom, returning with an increased understanding of the opportunities and challenges students will face in the workplace. This enables the educator to help students select effective work-based learning activities, choose among career pathways or foci of study in high school, and make other important decisions about post-secondary education, training, and careers.

Educator externships provide a remarkable long-term investment for business and industry. Bringing teachers, counsellors, and administrators into the workplace allows businesses to learn about the schools in their area and help educators and business leaders develop a means with which to talk about and plan for further school improvement. With stronger lines of communication between schools and industry, schools can help direct students towards meaningful careers and businesses can reduce their long-term training and recruitment costs and increase their rates of staff retention.

The Educator Externship Experience

It is important that the educator and participating business partner share a set of clear, reachable goals for their time together. Educators gain insight into the ever-evolving requirements of the world of work and businesses are able to provide input to the education system by working collaboratively with the schools. Business partners are encouraged to allow the educator to participate in as many facets of the business as possible, giving the educator a more complete and well-rounded experience.

During the externship program, educators keep journals of their experiences to assist in later translating the experience into learning objectives for their classes. Through journal entries, educators can reflect on how what they did in their Externship job relates to their subject area and what teaching strategies they can use in the classroom to incorporate what they have learned. A sample journal entry is given below:

Sample Journal Entry:

“This ends my journal entries for this internship. I think that it was a very good learning experience for me because it allowed me to see trainers in action and to experience corporate training in an authentic setting. I really enjoyed talking with Wade about training and other educational issues. I am grateful that I had this opportunity.

What has come across in all of our meetings and in the training classes is that employees need to have some basic skills in the area of interpersonal relations. By that I mean that students who wish to go into hospitality must have a generally good outlook and personality and be able to take responsibility for their actions. Teachers in secondary school might address this by including

role playing in their lessons when covering hospitality topics in order to engender a sense of reality into the class.”

Upon returning to the classroom, educators will have gained a new perspective on the relevancy of their subject area to the “real world of work.” The experience in the business world grants teachers a greater sense of one of the key purposes of education: to prepare students for meaningful, fulfilling careers and personal economic success as contributing members of their community.

A Sample Lesson Plan for the Externship would include the competencies listed in SCANS and the Three Part Foundation Skills. The educator would have outlined these skills while fulfilling their 50 hour externship (through interviews and journal notes) thereby developing a lesson plan that addresses the skills and competencies required in today's workplace. As a result, the lesson plan will directly involve students in the acquisition of work-specific or career- related skills as experienced by their instructor in the workplace.

SUMMARY

The Educator Externship Program provides an opportunity for teachers to enhance their teaching. Subject matter content can be made more relevant to students by informing them how it applies to the world of work. Teachers must be familiar with the ever-changing workplace and what skills, knowledge, abilities, and attitudes are required for success. The externship program gives the educator a firsthand perspective of new and evolving competencies through a minimum of 50 hours spent at a business or industry. By implementing what they learn from their experiences into their curriculum, teachers can better prepare students for what to expect in the “real world of work.”