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Internship Programs in Distressed Communities

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Abstract

This co-learning plan will introduce new knowledge in the area of “Internship Programs in Distressed Communities”. The plan will examine the best practices for creating internship programs that work with community development organizations located in urban regions through Michigan.

Relating back to Saginaw Valley State University, this plan will build upon the relationship created between the “Lansing Living Leadership Program (L3)” and the South Lansing Community Development Association (SLCDA).

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Internship Programs in Distressed Communities

Since 1970, we have learned that no city or region can survive indefinitely on the strength of a single primary business or industry (Gordon, 2012). The “snow belt” region, (United States Upper Mid-West) has learned this lesson through the loss of manufacturing jobs. These lost jobs have caused states like Michigan, to enter a long period of economic stagnation (Osborne, 1994). Due to this stagnation, many of the cities in the Michigan have shrunk, and become distressed (Bernard, 1991).

Some cities in Michigan have been working to overcome their very negative perceptions by working to identify the assets that currently exist within their community. In Detroit, it took leaders like Mayor Dennis Archer to solicit involvement from the heads of the three automotive companies, local utilities and other major businesses for the downtown revitalization (Dreier, 2004). Even though the Mayor helped bring \$400 million and 4,000 workers of new investment to downtown Detroit, the Mayor was criticized for not working to try and revitalize area neighborhoods. Since then, citizens have been creating positive change through the creation of their own organizations to try and revitalize area neighborhoods.

Internship Experience in Practice

In cities like Detroit, citizens are beginning to revitalize their neighborhoods. Emily Doerr, a graduate of Central Michigan University saw a need in her community. Emily loved to travel, and would frequent hostels as an affordable alternative to hotels. She recognized the importance of a hostel and knew that Detroit did not have one. Therefore, she started up “Hostel Detroit”, as an affordable alternative to a hotel in her neighborhood. She believed this would assist with the revitalization of the community she lived in.

Ms. Doerr’s action is significant. She was an individual in her mid-20s that identified a problem in her community and addressed that problem. One factor that assisted with her success was an internship she completed with the Center for Progressive Leadership. Her internship at the Center for Progressive Leadership taught her the skills to be able to lead a Community Development Organization, or CDO (Appendix A).

How can we, as leaders in Michigan, transform these students’ valuable experiences into something that creates enthusiasm within our graduates to become entrepreneurs and create their own grassroots organizations within our urban centers and distressed communities (duplicating the success of Ms. Doerr in Detroit)?

Importance of Internships

It is small CDOs, like Hostel Detroit; that can make positive changes in many distressed communities throughout Michigan. Without the availability of internship opportunities, organizations like Hostel Detroit might not have as large of a positive impact. On the flip side, if individuals like Ms. Doerr didn’t have opportunities to

participate in an internship, individuals might not have the capacity to be able to start up their own organizations.

College interns play a significant role in community development. These CDOs depend upon interns with specific skills that add value to their organization, and students depend upon CDOs for opportunities to develop their skill sets.

Importance to Economic Development

Governor Snyder has mentioned that for us to attain a strong Michigan, we must have strong urban centers (Snyder, 2011). Some of the public policies that have been executed in Detroit, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo have created strong city centers. However, the distressed communities located within these large cities have not received the same attention for development as their city centers.

Community development organizations are working with distressed communities and becoming the vehicle for community and economic growth within our urban neighborhoods. Furthermore, a large number of the staff within these organizations are interns, or the organizations paid staff were former interns with the organization.

Organizations like the Direct Action & Research Training (DART) do have professional development opportunities for college graduates, but do not have an internship program for undergraduate students (DART, 2012). If we are able to create a method to proliferate the ability of former interns to become entrepreneurial and start-up their own grassroots organization, then we may be able to go an additional step and create new community development organizations within our distressed communities (Shane, 2004).

Description of Problem / Issue

Understanding the best practices for creating internship programs that work with community development organizations is important for multiple reasons. **When we examine the importance of internship programs through the eyes of an institution of higher learning, these programs offer students a service -- a learning opportunity that teaches transferable skill sets, for which a student could apply in any career** (Mulroy, 2004). Through the eyes of an executive director of a community development organization, an enthusiastic intern can be a value added piece, which assists in allowing the organization to move forward.

The important piece of the discussion that continues to be ignored is, “how do we replicate these programs for other distressed communities?” If we can create a vehicle for other institutions of higher learning (universities, liberal arts colleges, community colleges) to partner with local community development groups, then both the university and the local community development organization will benefit.

This study will examine some of these best practices; look at who have been organizing these programs; and how these programs can be replicated throughout the State of Michigan. The study will make recommendations about what we can do to assist with the continued development of programs that are similar in nature. This study will also act as a guide to answer all questions that are commonly asked to me as an internship coordinator and faculty member.

Discussion

Throughout the United States there are many different types of internships; internships are available through Greenpeace to internships with the Alaskan Conservation Society. For the purpose of this study we will be examining the value of interns in community development organizations. We examine the value of these organizations because they are assisting and adding value to distressed communities. As mentioned prior, it is important to examine the interns within these organizations because they make up a major part of the human capital, and without this human capital, the organization would not add value or create positive change within the distressed community

Best Practices Throughout U.S.

Chicago

Within Chicago, the Hyde Park-Kentwood Community Conference has been working with the University of Chicago for years to redevelop the communities immediately surrounding the University. “The partnership with the neighbors around Hyde Park has been enhancing the quality of life and economic development of the South Side of Chicago” (University of Chicago, 2012).

At the University of Chicago, they have been working to improve urban education and health care through very systematic means in the classroom (University of Chicago, 2012). Also, the University has many volunteer opportunities with “community-service” based organizations like “Paint for Pride” or “Habitat for Humanity”. For students to acquire an internship with the Hyde Park-Kentwood Community Conference, they go through the University Community Service Center (UCSC) website that allows students to sign up for enrollment in their “Summer Links” internship program. Summer Links is an internship program that has placed over 400 students with 200 different organizations throughout Chicago. Summer links is one of multiple programs that is helping the UCSC meet their vision of becoming a national model for “student civic engagement, experiential learning and community service” by 2015 (University of Chicago, 2012).

Philadelphia

Throughout Philadelphia, the University of Pennsylvania coordinates with various community development corporations, and 501(c)3 organizations. These corporations

have on average about 15 full-time staff and about double that number in AmeriCorps volunteers and interns. The University of Pennsylvania has a summer internship program through their “Netter Center for Community Partnerships” (University of Pennsylvania, 2012). This 12-week program is for 15 undergraduate students that engage the West Philadelphia Penn community. Each undergraduate works collaboratively to solve a public policy issue, while also working as an intern in a local school or a community of faith in West Philadelphia.

All students engaged in this program live together in university housing; take one course that is taught by a faculty member about public service and public policy. The students are paid a stipend of \$2,500, take the class for free and receive free university housing for the summer (University of Pennsylvania, 2012).

Milwaukee

In Milwaukee, there are various community development groups that work directly with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Housed within their School of Continuing Education, their Center for Community-Urban Development works to build partnerships between community residents and the university. This center implements initiatives that engage residents to work together for positive change throughout the communities of Milwaukee (University of Wisconsin -Milwaukee, 2012).

These initiatives include custom-designed classes and service learning activities that combine classroom learning with community action projects. UW-Milwaukee does all of their community outreach through “in-house” projects and does not actively promote internships for students with local community development groups. This does not mean there is not faculty at UW-Milwaukee that enroll students for internships with community development groups.

Columbus

The Ohio State University and Columbus Economic and Community Development Institute (CECDI) have partnered on various projects. The OSU Extension in Franklin County and CECDI, established internship programs for juniors and seniors at OSU (Columbus, 2012). Unlike Philadelphia, there is no course available for the students, however, the CECDI does have a fairly well established internship program and many of their students have gone on to becoming an AmeriCorps VISTA within their office.

There are also small community development organizations around Columbus that partner with Ohio State. However, many of these organizations work with faculty to identify students who might have a strong interest with interning in their organization.

Michigan

Within Michigan, community development organizations are following similar

practices to Chicago, Philadelphia, Columbus, and Milwaukee. In Detroit, Hostel Detroit works with Wayne State University to attract students to come and volunteer with their organization (Hostel Detroit, 2012). Also, in Lansing, the Old Town Association has eight staff and of the eight staff, six of them are interns from Michigan State University (Old Town, 2012).

Lansing

Approximately 10-years ago, the South Lansing Community Development Association (SLCDA) was founded to serve the distressed community of South Lansing. Over the past 10-years this organization that began with one individual, yhas grown to an organization of seven staff and many more volunteers. The organization started from an office in a residence, and transformed into an office space in the back of a church.

This organization is not supported by tax dollars, but through grant funding and, fundraising. The organization supports both community and economic development through multiple lenses. From a community development lens, the organization supports farmers markets, community gardens, nutrition education and community engagement. Through an economic development lens the organization supports assisting small business owners with promotion of their business start-ups and also attracting small businesses into South Lansing (SLCDA, 2012).

To meet these objectives of the organization, the executive director depends upon the AmeriCorps program; grant funding from outside sources, volunteers and college interns for human capital to support her organization. Without the human capital that is provided through college interns, or volunteers, SLCDA would be a one-person operation and unable to meet all of their objectives, nonetheless create positive change to the scale that they have in South Lansing.

The South Lansing Community Development Association. has been looking for interns from institutions of higher learning throughout Michigan since 2006. SLCDA has taken interns from local community colleges, Michigan State University, and Saginaw Valley State University.

Grand Rapids

Around the same time that the SLCDA came to fruition, a small organization called LINC (then Lighthouse Communities) also started in the Southtown Area of Grand Rapids. As with any organization, the scope and mission has increased in breadth over the past 10 years. Starting off with a focus on affordable housing, LINC now encompasses a holistic lens of community redevelopment. Just like the SLCDA, this organization grew from 2 individuals in 2002, to a staff of 35 in 2012 (LINC, 2012). Unlike the SLCDA, this organization does have a full-time, paid staff, however, they still do rely heavily upon Americorps VISTAs, unpaid interns and volunteers.

The mission of LINC does encompass both economic and community development. From a community development standpoint, the organization works on affordable housing for residents, and from an economic development standpoint, LINC owns and operates an economic incubator for local entrepreneurs.

Since 2008, LINC has had 12-13 AmeriCorps VISTAs on staff, with 7-8 unpaid interns. Of the VISTAs, six have become full-time employees with LINC. Of the interns, three of them have continued on with employment at LINC. The executive director says that the college students and recent graduates bring passion and idealism to the organization, two very important parts of community organizing and relationship building.

Saginaw Valley Living Leadership Program

When college students begin looking for an internship in public service, Washington D.C. is usually the first spot they look for internships. With more than 20,000 interns every summer, there is a reason why students look to Washington D.C. (Johnson, 2010). Even though there are 20,000 internships available in DC every summer, most students know very little about these opportunities, or for our discussion, in Michigan.

When students work to identify an internship during their college experience, they look at a number of different places on campus for advising. They look to the college career services office, faculty, alumni, print resources (guides / books), or online resources like www.internmichigan.org.

As an internship coordinator at Saginaw Valley, I have developed a “full-service option” for students to build their resume, cover letter, and reference sheet, identify internship opportunities within their interest (non-discipline driven), and also provide interviewing assistance. Beyond simply assisting a student with the identification of an internship and attaining an internship, I have also developed a course that accompanies the student’s internship experience.

At Saginaw Valley, we have understood the need for interns in grassroots and political organizations. Therefore, we developed a program similar to the program delivered by the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania. The program is made up of a 3-credit course that teaches basic public policy and leadership skills; along with a 3-credit independent study course (for the student to earn class credit for the internship upon completion). The program has worked to deliver a course along with an internship in a political office or a CDO. The program at Saginaw Valley has been tagged the “Living Leadership” program.

The difference between a traditional internship class and the “Living Leadership” program is that the students live, intern and take a class in Lansing or Washington D.C. This model mimics many internship programs offered by non-profit organizations in Washington. Our program is unlike the programs in Washington D.C. because the entire

program is completed “in-house” and the total cost is about \$3.5K for 8-weeks in Washington D.C. and \$1.5K for 3-months in Lansing. The costs are fairly affordable, when compared to D.C. programs that cost between \$5K and \$10K. We also have scholarship and fellowship options to help offset some of these costs. Our programs have been developed mainly for Lansing, Michigan and Washington D.C. to take place during the summer semester for 10-15 students, however, our future planning has turned to examining the possibility of offering an option for a “Living Leadership” program in Detroit.

The living portion of the program is arranged through apartment / housing rentals, but all rental contracts are made between the students and the apartment companies. In Washington D.C., the students live on Capitol Hill, and in Lansing they live in an apartment complex near Michigan State. The students usually all live in the same house in D.C. or in the same complex in Lansing, similar to an “oxfordshire” model, or a “residential-college” where students in the same program live and learn together.

The class portion of the “Living Leadership” program encompasses 3-credit hours and takes place over a 7 ½ week session (1/2 semester). The first week of class includes five 6-hour class sessions to complete 30 of the 45 required instructional hours. The class takes place from 9A-12P, then from 1:30P-4:30P in the afternoon. Throughout the week, guest lecturers from different organizations (political, non-profit, for-profit) teach public policy. These lectures last for approximately an hour. Directors from CDOs also speak during the guest lectures. The final 15 instructional hours are completed with a 5-week discussion forum on-line (SAKAII / Blackboard). The objective of the class is to teach students about public policy and basic leadership concepts (Komives, 2007).

The internship portion of the “Living Leadership” program includes 120 in-service hours, along with the completion of a daily work journal, reflection paper and 20-page public policy paper. Students also select a book from a list of current events or a public policy question that is of interest to them. Most students write a public policy paper related to an issue involved in their place of employment. This summer, one of our students in Washington D.C. who interned with the National Archives wrote about the impacts of the declining revenues from governmental entities to support museums and the cultural arts. His paper offered insight about possible solutions to this policy problem.

Our program tries to expand the skill sets for a student that wants to work in public policy or public service. Some students choose to work in a legislative office, or with a local CDO. Students have very specific ideas about what they want to do. Upon seeking out internships this past spring, a Saginaw Valley student hoped to intern with the National Archives. This student was a history major, with the intention of becoming a PhD student in museum studies. Not only were the National Archives happy to have him as an intern, when he graduates, they have already offered him a chance to return for future summer fellowships.

40 students have participated in the program since 2009. Of these 40 students, 26 of them have graduated. Of the 26 who have graduated, 25 have enrolled in law or

graduate school, or have acquired employment within their field. When we examine these results 100% of the 25 students who have enrolled in graduate school or have acquired employment went back to work for the organization in which they interned, became an AmeriCorps VISTA, or have gone on to work for a different CDO. Some of our alumni indicated in follow-up interviews they wanted to become an entrepreneur and start their own CDO in the near future, though they wanted to continue to develop their skills before doing so.

Each year we survey internship coordinators and inquire about whether there are any additional needs or changes that they would like to see from the program. Some of the survey respondents noted the need for interns that were grant writers, effective communicators, and those who understand the role of a change agent. To meet the needs of internship coordinators, a multi-disciplinary minor in “Leadership & Service” has been developed that will hopefully assist students with practical skills within the desired areas that have been identified by the CDOs. Our hope is this minor will assist students with gaining the practical skills they will need to navigate and effectively contribute to the work of CDOs, while still maintaining the integrity of a rigorous undergraduate liberal arts education.

This “Living Leadership” program is successful because of the mentoring connections made between faculty, internship coordinators and students. According to Tinto (1994), the connections between students and faculty are important when developing a new academic program that results in an increase in young professional retention and also in providing a successful departure from an institution of higher learning.

Recommendations

In America today, we have many urban centers in the Midwest that continue to lose the younger population. However, some urban centers, are noticing a huge resurgence of educated youth (Gallagher, 2010). Many of these young people fall into the “Millennial Generation” sharing many of the same characteristics as their grandparents; the “G.I. Generation”, who understood the positive value of community service.

Before these youth graduate from college and move to the urban centers; they are usually engaged in multiple service projects that are available on their campus (Kouzes, 2008). These projects range from a study abroad to alternative spring break trips, which both often include various service project opportunities. Once the students graduate, these service opportunities are not as prevalent or accessible as they were while the student was on campus (Trani, 2010).

College graduates are moving to urban centers at a high-rate. They are looking for an urban lifestyle. These graduates desire opportunities to help their community and there are organizations that can offer them. Within these urban centers, organizations like

AmeriCorps, Teach for America, Paint for Pride, or Habitat for Humanity that a young college graduate could become involved with. However, for this conversation, we are examining opportunities at CDOs that can be identified through an efficient and available means. Currently, there are some online portals available to community members to find volunteer opportunities, but usually they do not extend to internship or employment opportunities.

Institutions of higher education could play a more important role in assisting college students to navigate the world of internships with CDOs. Colleges and universities already do an excellent job finding community service projects for students. But they could go one step further, and empower career service offices and faculty members to also identify internship and employment opportunities.

Information for faculty and staff

Through my experience at Saginaw Valley, the interns that participate in our “Living Leadership” intern program come from all disciplines and academic levels; including college graduates. We have successfully placed students from various academic majors in a range of internships where community based organizations are looking for strong writers, clear thinkers, and self-starters. There is even a case in which a college graduate didn’t get around to deciding they wanted to work in a community-based organization until after they graduated.

Most undergraduate students wait until their last year of undergraduate studies to participate in an internship, although, the best semester for a student to participate in an internship is as early as possible. There are all kinds of opportunities for internships, however it really does depend on when the student feels comfortable giving complete presence to the internship.

When dealing with CDOs, most organizations have a need for an intern and volunteers year around. Community based internships with grant writing and communications are best for students between their junior and senior year of college. These students have honed their writing skills and may have some qualifications (like courses they’ve taken) that are attractive to certain organizations (Byrne, 2006). Internships for freshmen or sophomores are also valuable because it can help students gain skills that will make them stronger internship candidates in higher skill fields.

One of the easiest ways for faculty members to begin identifying community based internships is through their contacts on-campus with the student affairs office, or the local United Way office with a list of CDOs in the area. Through this list of organizations, a faculty member may get to know the area CDO staff, and familiarize themselves with the needs of those organizations, maybe even get to build a personal relationship with the executive director or manager of the organization. Through these connections, a faculty member is able to identify internships and also possibly have an

available list of community leaders that could come in as guest lecturers for classes throughout the semester.

A vast majority of students choose summers internships because they are focused on classes and other on-campus activities during the school year (Byrne, 2006). Living Leadership has found that when a student is able to identify an internship that is a perfect fit for the student, the student will continue on with the organization as a part-time intern or volunteer until the following summer, or until they graduate. If a faculty member is able to identify community based internships within a reasonable distance from the university, then the opportunity for the student to continue within an internship throughout the academic year is more likely.

When identifying internships within your region, ask yourself the following questions:

- *What type of organization are you working with?*
- *In what areas does the organization deal with?*
- *What types of skills does the internship teach?*
- *Where does the student apply? (Campus-based, print, online)*

Information to assist students

All programs should begin to work with students, at least one year prior to the start of their application process to acquire an internship. This gives a student enough time to collect all necessary materials and put applications together. *(Smaller organizations typically do not have deadlines on internships; but many of the larger organizations do.)* One year of planning gives the student enough time to work with the financial aid office to acquire scholarships, fellowships, grants, or loans that might be needed to offset the costs of participating in an internship.

With thousands of internships to choose from within Michigan (according to interninmichigan.com), it may be difficult for students to decide how to limit their search. When we examine www.interninmichigan.com, a portal for internships across Michigan, there are various sectors for college students to find internships. There are even internships available for students who might want to work for a CDO.

If the idea of working in an internship anywhere, excites a student, then a student might have an easier time than a student who is looking for a specific internship. There are CDOs that are focused on educational policy, and CDOs that are more concerned with health and wellness within the local community. Certain internships might be housed within a local Hostel (as with Hostel Detroit), and some might be working at the Boys & Girls club. There are CDOs that have sponsorship arrangements with foundations (LINC), whereas others are purely CDOs within distressed communities relying on smaller grants and fundraising (SLCDA).

CDO offices typically have a staff of fifteen or fewer, with less than half in administrative roles. The physical space in these offices can range from the back of a church (such as the South Lansing Community Development Association) to an old house (such as Hostel Detroit). Most of the staff will share a room and most interns will share the same desk and office equipment (telephone / computer / etc.). Whatever the size of the organization, students can still receive a very substantive work experience. Faculty and CDO staff should make sure students get a clear idea of what the student is hoping to gain. If a student has a particular interest within grant writing, a faculty member might want to work to identify these needs with local CDOs.

Most students are asked to answer phones, respond to communications and work with residents in the community. Students also volunteer at special events that the organization sponsors within the community. As with most grassroots internships, students are assigned special research projects or new programs, or draft talking points for the executive director. Whatever the assignment, students should be reminded that if they are willing to complete the mundane tasks, they may be assigned more interesting special projects later.

In an internship, students work directly with the internship coordinator. This coordinator most of the time turns out to also be the executive director in smaller organizations. In larger organizations, the coordinator position might belong to a receptionist or staff assistant. It is important for students not to dismiss a receptionist or staff assistant, as they are probably former interns themselves and can usually become the best mentor for that student in the office. The coordinator is also most likely to be the person that assists the student with a letter of recommendation and with developing their professional network during the internship.

Students should know that as an intern, they are likely to spend a great deal of time directly with an executive director, and will most likely be very close on the day-to-day action within the office. Many of the smaller organizations have limited resources, which means they usually do not have enough staff to do everything they would like to do, and are not able to pay high salaries to their staff. This usually means interns are welcome to and are often provided the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way to the work of the organization.

Because of the wide array of internships available with CDOs, it is very hard to say what a student might be doing. It is important for faculty to find out what a student would like to do after college and try to identify internship opportunities with grassroots organizations that are of particular interest. This opportunity could lead to employment after college or at very least some well-placed references within the field of endeavor for the student (Feller, 2005).

One of my former students at Saginaw Valley had this to say when he compared his legislative internship experience to his grassroots experience: *“With the community development internship, I felt like I got a more personal experience. In my office, there were as many interns as there were staff. It created a culture where the interns and staff*

were good friends. We were able to talk to them and find out what they were interested in.”

Skills needed from students

Experience

Students often worry that they need some experience on their resume in order to apply for an internship. Experience helps, it is not needed. Working with students through the resume building process, faculty and staff can usually assist a student with identifying important skills they acquired from different activities and jobs that they have participated in.

Language Skills

Language skills are important for certain positions in communities that do not speak English as a first language. All students should feel comfortable with their writing and communication skills before accepting an internship. As mentioned earlier, a majority of CDOs are looking for grant writers and interns that feel comfortable with speaking to members of the public.

Coursework

Coursework does not need to be in political science or public administration, students from engineering, biology, communications, nursing and education participate in CDO internships at SVSU. We reach out to other disciplines and departments with campus-wide seminars about the “Living Leadership” program. Also, through the interdisciplinary “Leadership & Service” minor, students from different disciplines are exposed to the program. One of my students recalled: *“After the experience I realized that no one at the office ever asked me what my major was.”* This is very common among most of the experiences that our interns have gone through.

Data Analysis

Throughout most exit surveys that we have conducted, one constant has been that student’s wish they had been better prepared to interpret and work with data. Even though it is not required to complete an internship, the ability to, research and interpret data increases the value of the student to the organization.

Writing

The ability to write well is quite possibly the most important skill students can have. The smaller the organization, the more likely the student works to communicate concepts and issues to a variety of audiences. Writing skills are difficult to learn in the short term, but over the long term students improve their writing skills.

Do these students get paid for their experience?

Grassroots organizations have limited funding sources. CDOs can pay an intern or volunteer when they receive a grant or donation that allows for a small summer stipend or other benefit to be paid to interns. The lack of pay through a CDO internship experience can turn a student away from the opportunity, but the bottom line of the value from the internship in the long term is not about how much a student will be paid, but how much the student will learn about the industry the student wants to become involved in, and the contacts through networking.

Where should students apply for internships?

Usually college campuses have a list of internships available at their career services office. The internships vary. They can be in corporations like “Enterprise Rent-A-Car” or in Washington D.C. offices. Some university career service centers do not reach out to small local organizations and ask for them to consider starting an internship program.

Of the four CDOs that “Living Leadership” spoke with in Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing and Saginaw; none of them had an internship program, until a faculty member or student had contacted them to discuss it with them. Only LINC had actively pursued recruiting interns at the local career fair at Grand Valley State University.

Sometimes internship programs start with compiling all internships from one industry within one region and passing this list onto faculty members. Other times it begins when a faculty member and a work-study student contact all non-profit agencies within a region and inquire about the need for an intern within their organization (as we did at Saginaw Valley). In “Living Leadership’s” experience, we’ve found the most effective means for identifying opportunities has been through the networking that follows public lectures and policy panels that involve local community leaders.

More efficient, systematic means can exist at different institutions, dependent upon the access to staff and assistants that can help with communications to local agencies. Saginaw Valley sent out a letter to over 200 community groups in the Great Lakes Bay Region (including Mt. Pleasant and Flint) about the opportunity to develop an internship program and mentoring an intern during an academic semester. Through this system, there was an average 20% response rate over the past 3-years. After an agency responds to our request, we follow up with a phone call to ask about their organizational needs and capacity. Before we list an internship within the Center for Public Policy & Service office, we ask the organization to develop a job description to post within our office and also at our online portal.

After the completion of an internship, the student and the organization complete a survey. Data is gathered from this survey tool and we then assess whether or not the organization remains a good fit for learning outcomes and career development of our students. We can also identify when we may be wasting an internship coordinator’s time

because our interns and volunteers are not a good fit with the mission and objectives of their organization.

How else can we prepare students to be successful in their internships?

The point we should consider is that CDOs are fueled in large part by the labor of interns they hire. One director through an exit survey stated, *"We could not get our office to function daily without the interns that come through our door."*

While some people in the system look at interns as free labor and they do not act as mentors; they are in the minority. Through the exit surveys that are issued to intern supervisors of grassroots organizations, you should be able to avoid these types of people in the future.

Even though students are not usually paid for internships with CDOs, they should still try to maintain a strong level of professionalism in their role. We can also prepare students by remaining cognizant about the dress code, manners, and other factors that keep an office environment, professional.

Dress Code: Unlike internships in Washington and Lansing, CDOs rarely have a dress code for the office. A simple inquiry to internship coordinators prior to students entering their internship will assist with preparing the student for the work environment. My rule to students is to dress casually, in business casual and conservative. This means no shorts, flip-flops, or exposed skin (unless the boss says otherwise). I also tell men to be neat with short haircuts and, to women that they usually want to have their hair pulled back and to wear subtle jewelry.

Manners: Students should recognize that even though the organization they are interning with might be in the back of a church, or out of a garage, that they still need to be polite and fairly formal. They should treat their internship as a full-time job. They should keep their shared workplace clean and neat. The biggest problem that I have run into in the past is when students get "too comfortable" in the workplace and they don't represent the organization in a good light. Reminding students that as an intern they represent the organization 24/7 is important for their success.

Office Hours: Getting college students to adjust from an academic schedule that is fairly flexible to the "daily grind" can sometimes become problematic. Properly informing students about the long hours they will be working with CDOs will assist them with being successful in the internship. Students (and faculty) will be surprised to see the wide array of hours that interns may work for CDOs. I have had students inform me that before a major event or fundraiser that they have worked four 16-hour days; then have 5-days off after the event to recover. It is also important for students to understand that they will need to work at least 10-weeks on a regular schedule in an internship before they move from working daily administrative tasks into more interesting special projects.

Ask Questions: On the first day of an internship, students should first ask their supervisor for a detailed description of work duties. Make sure that students feel comfortable with asking for clarity about their work duties. Some internship opportunities will have supervisors that are very clear with the tasks that they assign to interns, whereas others may not. Students should try to be proactive and ask questions about any ambiguities.

Asking for Feedback: Traditionally, there is always a “feedback loop” for internship coordinators to evaluate the student interns. This can be done in multiple ways; either face-to-face, filling out a survey, or a paper evaluation at the end of the students internship period. It is valuable for students to ask for feedback from their supervisors at various points throughout their internship. By receiving immediate feedback from supervisors, students may be able to improve upon what they are working on.

As I mentioned earlier, all of our students that have completed an internship with a CDO, have graduated and then gone on to work for the same CDO, become an AmeriCorps VISTA, or gone on to work for a different CDO. Through these internships, students have all developed their professional network because they became “the public face” on certain projects within the organization they were working for. Most of the former interns took advantage of the opportunity to develop their network and this assisted them with acquiring a job after graduation.

Implementation

Most organizations could implement a program that is similar to the “Living Leadership” program at Saginaw Valley. The “Living Leadership” program started off with one faculty member and has grown into a program with an advisory committee of ten faculty members from different departments and two administrators.

Funding

The program is sponsored by approximately \$5,000 a year from endowments and another \$10,000 a year from student funding. Therefore, an organization would need to develop a funding model that would be able to pay for some, or all of the costs that a student would incur through participation in the program. Students within the program have also sought out external scholarships and funding to offset additional costs.

Logistics

If an institution has a “Domestic Programs” office, similar to an “International Programs” office, then the office might be able to handle the logistical planning. As the program coordinator, a majority of the planning for student housing, identifying classroom space and also creating a travel plan is up to you.

Identifying internship opportunities for students does also take a tremendous amount of time and resources. Over the past 4-years that we have been running the

program, there have been hundreds of hours dedicated to building relationships with internship coordinators at different organizations. The most efficient way to identify these opportunities is through a letter that is sent out to all of the CDOs. Within this letter is a request for information about any internship opportunities or needs that the organization may have. After this information is acquired, then a meeting is set up with the internship coordinator to flesh out details about the internship and to receive a copy of a job description.

Recruitment

Attracting students to the program is not difficult. Through the use of online and electronic resources, we have been able to enroll approximately 15 students per summer to participate in the program. Throughout an academic year, we will also hold two informational sessions about the program and also work with other on-campus communication sources to inform students about the program.

Alumni Relations

We have also developed a strong network of alumni that assist our recent graduates with identifying jobs and assisting with fundraising to support our internship endowment. Our alumni network has been sustained through the assistance of alumni in Washington D.C. and Lansing that meet once a month in what is referred to as a “caucus”. This network in both D.C. and Lansing help recent graduates with identifying jobs and networking. The alumni network also helps facilitate two fundraising events that we hold per year on-campus. The funds that are raised assist and support our fellowship programs, which offset the costs for the Lansing and D.C. programs.

Next Steps

Our next step in the program is the implementation of the “Leadership & Service” minor. This minor will further assist with creating an outlet for students to continue to develop their skills in writing, communication, managing change; along with understanding ethics and culture. We hope that between the “Leadership & Service” coursework and the “Living Leadership” capstone project in the program, alumni of the program and students will join or start up their own grassroots organization in a distressed community.

A program like this could be started almost anywhere, even though this program was developed and implemented at an institution of higher learning. A similar program at the University of Detroit-Mercy exists and has had similar results. This program could be as easily conceptualized with a regional branch of the United Way, or through a regionally based non-profit organization (or Chamber of Commerce). Implementing a program like this does take a lot of coordination between community and university stakeholders, but the program should be sustainable as long as there is buy-in from the

faculty (and staff) that has access to students, and the CDO internship coordinators that have the needs for interns.

Conclusion

The CDOs in our distressed communities are working to alleviate the problems of proper nutrition, education, affordable housing, and economic development. These same organizations also depend heavily upon volunteers and college interns to bring positive change to distressed communities. Whether the interns are working to teach best practices of nutrition to local residents, or the interns are helping with a CDO fundraiser, they make a measureable positive impact in the community. As faculty members, college staff and leaders within CDOs; we should work to continue to develop programs that are making linkages between students looking for internships and the internship opportunities that are available with CDOs in distressed communities.

This is important for the distressed communities of Michigan because these communities are lacking public funds to make significant positive change. There is a need for more private-public partnerships between CDOs and governmental entities to assist with this positive change. However, without experienced staff, CDOs could lack the human capital to make a measureable impact. Therefore, we should work to develop programs that assist students with developing multiple skill sets that are valuable to CDOs. If these goals include teaching students to become entrepreneurial and starting up their own community organizations, then our programs should develop leaders and nurture that entrepreneurial spirit (Young, 2009).

There is a value added from internships with CDOs in distressed communities. This value added is noticed and welcomed by executive directors. The executive directors of CDOs mention that the students have been better prepared for their internships and are more accountable for their work when they participate in an internship class or program. Through these internships, students have stated that they have been able to improve their research skills, acquire content area experience and gained a better idea of where they wanted their career paths to go. Directors of CDOs in distressed communities have indicated that these skills are invaluable when graduates apply for jobs with their organization. Some of the graduates have also indicated that the internship assisted them with being a candidate for a job within the interview process.

These internships assisted with helping graduates become enthusiastic about their career choices after graduation. They felt that they knew what they were getting themselves into and were very optimistic when they had to address a new challenge in the work place. One graduate mentioned that, *"it isn't all about hard work, it is about having passion with the tasks that you take on each day."* This passion is what helps with making a good impression within the workplace and the community that the graduates work within, along with assisting and developing their professional network.

With this study, the intent is to offer advice about how we, as leaders in Michigan, can transform these students' valuable experiences into something that creates enthusiasm within our graduates to become entrepreneurs and create their own grassroots organizations within our urban centers and distressed communities. As faculty, staff and leaders, I hope that this study can also work as a guide to answer all questions that are commonly asked to me as an internship coordinator and faculty member.

This study should be used as a pathway for starting a conversation with CDOs within your own community. And hopefully that conversation assists you with creating an exciting and vibrant internship program that will assist with creating enthusiastic social entrepreneurs. Good luck!

Appendix A

Community Development Organizations

For the purpose of this study, we are defining Community Development Organizations (CDOs) as 501(c)3 organizations that engage in collective action to achieve a community goal and are primarily funded through "soft money" (Turner, 2009). Community development organizations can sometimes be referred to as grassroots organizations, faith-based action groups, or participatory planning teams.

The "soft money" for CDOs comes primarily through grants and fundraising with very few funds coming from governmental entities. Because these organizations are primarily funded through "soft monies", they need to be frugal with the funds they have, and must be as efficient as possible with their payroll. Because of these factors, most executive directors have followed similar practices to organizations that are located in cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Milwaukee and Columbus. The common theme is that the executive directors often find an institution of higher learning and partner with that institution to acquire interns to work within their organization (Shumer, 2009). From the community development side, it seems that the staff of the organizations do a fairly good job with providing a fruitful experience for the interns. From the higher education side, there have been few programs that have integrated a class experience with the internship experience (Peters, 2010). In simple terms, there are few programs where faculty has become involved with developing an internship course, beyond an independent study (which seems to be the common course to earn academic credit for internship participation).

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