

Quick Guide to Internships and Other Field/Professional Experiences for Program-level Assessment

This quick guide was prepared by the WSU Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness (ACE) and is intended to help WSU programs and faculty consider good practices for using internships and other field/professional experiences to assess student learning as part of program-level assessment. ACE is also available to collaborate with WSU undergraduate degree programs on internship and other field/professional experience evaluations as measures for program assessment. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for more information.

Introduction

Internships and other field/professional experiences are valuable high-impact practices that can provide students with opportunities to apply knowledge and skills from coursework in professional or work settings. At WSU, some undergraduate programs require or recommend that their majors complete internship, practicum, clinical, service learning, or similar courses/credits as part of the curriculum or program of study.

When Can Internships and Other Field/Professional Experiences Contribute to Program Assessment?

For program assessment, internships and other field/professional experiences may provide programs with opportunities to assess student learning on program-level student learning outcomes (SLOs) in a work setting. However, internships and other field/professional experiences come in many forms and, depending on the context, may or may not align with program-level SLOs for a degree/major.

For example:

“Career Launching” Experiences

- Often target students nearing the end of BA/BS degree programs
- Typically require students to apply disciplinary knowledge and skills in the workplace and **may closely align with program-level SLOs**
- May also offer experiences and opportunities that do not align with program-level SLOs

“Exploration of Professionalism” Experiences

- Often pursued by students early in their academic careers
- Provide students with opportunities to explore a field of interest
- Typically, not specifically aligned to a particular program’s SLOs

Note: *In some contexts, internships and other field/professional experiences may offer data about program goals (broad, general statements of the aims of the program or teaching/learning process). These program goals might include providing majors with many different kinds of internships or other field/professional experiences, program engagement with local communities, or student participation rates in high impact practices. While valuable, these aims are beyond the scope of program-level SLO assessment and this resource. Additionally, there are a number of other considerations related to internships and other field/professional experiences (e.g., student liability, insurance, etc.) that are beyond the scope of program-level SLO assessment. Your college or department may have an internship coordinator (or similar position) that can serve as a resource, along with WSU’s Center for Civic Engagement, Academic Success and Career Center, and Office of Risk Management.*

How Can Internships and Other Field/Professional Experiences Contribute to Program Assessment?

Depending on the context, internships and other field/professional experiences may provide programs with opportunities to collect *direct* evidence of student performance on program-level SLOs **and/or** *indirect* evidence related to student learning on program-level SLOs. *Measures should be specifically designed for these purposes.*

Direct Measures of Student Performance on Program-level SLOs

In some cases, internships and other field/professional experiences may provide programs with *direct* evidence about student performance on program-level SLOs. This is possible when student work and/or supervisor/preceptor evaluations of student performance include a substantial focus on program-level SLOs, along with careful design and advance planning.

- **Faculty and/or experience supervisor/preceptor evaluation of a student work product.** If student work products produced during the experience require students to demonstrate their performance on program-level SLOs, those work products can be evaluated for program assessment by program faculty and/or the supervisor/preceptor. Using a rubric that makes clear what is considered to be adequate or exemplary performance and can help provide consistency in evaluations. However, consider that:
 - Not all projects or work products completed during an internship or other field/professional experience will require students to demonstrate program-level SLOs at a sufficient level.
 - In some cases, it may not be possible to share student work products from an internship or other field/professional experience with program faculty (e.g., due to confidentiality, proprietary issues, industry “ownership” of the work product, etc.).
 - Supervisors/preceptors may not understand or share program faculty standards for student performance. Where supervisors/preceptors will be involved in evaluating work products, it may be useful to ask supervisors/preceptors to help design and/or review the criteria or rubric.
- **Supervisor/preceptor evaluation of overall student performance.** A carefully constructed form or survey completed by supervisors/preceptors near the end of the experience can provide direct evidence of students’ skills and knowledge based on supervisor/preceptor observations of student performance. Ideally, the form should ask explicitly about student performance on program-level SLOs relevant to the experience. However, consider that:
 - Experiences may vary in terms of the amount of supervisor/preceptor observation/oversight and the kinds of tasks completed, which can limit a supervisor’s or preceptor’s evaluation.
 - Again, supervisors/preceptors may not understand or share program faculty standards for student performance. However, providing criteria or a rubric that makes clear what is considered to be adequate or exemplary performance can help provide consistency in evaluations (it can also be useful to ask supervisors/preceptors to help design and/or review the criteria or rubric). As another approach, supervisors/preceptors can also be asked to provide reflective qualitative comments about student performance on knowledge and skills related to specific program SLOs.

Indirect Measures of Student Learning on Program-level SLOs

Internships and other field/professional experiences often provide programs with perspectives (from students and/or supervisors/preceptors) and indicators that provide *indirect* evidence related to student learning on program-level SLOs. For example:

- **Supervisor/preceptor feedback on student activities, motivation, or behavior.** Evaluations of students’ enthusiasm, professional demeanor, and time management skills by supervisors/preceptors can provide

program faculty with information about behaviors shown to have a positive impact on student learning, such as motivation or interest, and general professionalism or career readiness.

- **Student self-assessment or reflection on their experience.** Asking students to complete a survey or write reflectively (e.g., journals, reflective papers, or other course assignments) about their internship or other field/professional experience and their perception of what they learned (or confidence in their knowledge and skills) can yield additional insightful indirect evidence.
- **Participation rates as an indicator of student progress/success.** Monitoring participation rates in internships and other field/professional experiences might provide information about the student experience, opportunities/availability, bottlenecks, and progress through the curriculum, and might suggest student satisfaction, preparedness, and affinity for these experiences, which can complement other assessment measures.

Additional Considerations for Internships and Other Field/Professional Experiences and Program Assessment

- When determining how internships and other field/professional experiences might contribute to a specific program's assessment, consider where there are opportunities to collect program assessment data with good representation of majors, what kind of assessment data can be collected, and who is positioned to participate in the assessment (e.g., faculty, supervisors, preceptors, students, etc.).
 - Programs and faculty should review their curriculum map (and update as needed) when considering where internships and other field/professional experiences fit in the curriculum/program of study and how they contribute to the program-level SLOs for the degree/major.
 - In degrees/majors where internships and other field/professional experiences are recommended (but not required) for students, consider the [sample size and representation](#) of students who choose to complete an internship or other field/professional experience.
 - Be sure to update the program's assessment plan to reflect considerations around when and how the assessment data will be collected and analyzed, and who will be involved.
- Students and supervisors/preceptors (or other partners, mentors, etc.) should be informed of program expectations for learning and related documentation. Students and supervisors/preceptors may need help understanding how the experience relates to classroom studies and program-level SLOs, especially if the internship is not directly connected to the student's major. This could involve designing projects, tasks, or assignments intentionally aligned with program-level SLOs.
- To maximize opportunities for students to apply disciplinary knowledge and skills during the experience, students should be carefully matched with industry or community partners, where possible. *Internships that are only loosely connected to the student's major may be of limited value for program-level SLO assessment. This aspect may be important to consider when students find their own placements.*
- Internships and other field/professional experiences that serve as an UCORE Integrative Capstone [CAPS] course must meet specific learning goals and requirements for [CAPS] designation, see the [UCORE Integrative Capstone \[CAPS\] Requirements](#) for more information.

Additional Resource

- Grose, A. (2017). [Internships, Integrative Learning and the Degree Qualifications Profile \(Occasional Paper No. 30\)](#). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Urbana Champaign and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.