

**2007 – 2009 CATL Scholar Application**  
**Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning**

**Enhancing Academic Challenge in the Human Service Internship**

*Overview*

This proposal addresses three priorities of Elon University: 1) academic challenge, 2) recognition as a national leader in experiential education, and 3) emphasis on the senior year experience. Academic challenge is a fundamental learning concern of all institutions of higher learning (Payne, Kleine, Purcell, & Carter, 2005). Elon has recently spent considerable time and energy on this topic as evidenced by the Academic Summit held on September 22, 2006.

Experientially-based courses need to be particularly mindful of clarifying expectations of academic challenge. It is recommended that faculty teaching such classes base grades on demonstrated learning and not simply on time spent in the field or number of tasks completed (Eyler & Giles, 1999). In terms of national recognition, this proposal seeks to provide a model for this type of student assessment in internships. This work will also place attention on the senior year experience as students focus on specific measurable learning outcomes that will translate into marketable knowledge and skills.

The Human Services Department has 3 courses with a field-based component. HUS 111 Introduction to Human Services requires students to complete a 40 hour service-learning project in a non-profit agency. Our Winter Term course HUS 381 Practicum in Human Services requires that students spend 14 full agency days in a field site. Finally, HUS 481 Internship in Human Services occurs in the senior year and involves a 40 day placement for which students receive 8 credits.

Our extensive experience with field-based learning has brought us in contact with many other departments across campus who offer internships. Our observations suggest that very few departments place an emphasis on the integration of academic content in their internships. During the last SACS review, the majority of departments did not even have a syllabus associated with their internship. It is our impression that many departments do use student writing within the internship, but that the assignment is often based upon fairly unstructured reflection. Most internships across campus do not

have an associated curriculum which requires students to read beyond their experience. We want students to “read their experience” but there should also be a body of knowledge they are challenged to master and integrate with their experience along with learning outcomes they are expected to attain.

Faculty often assume that there is not serious academic content associated with internship. This specific issue was noted in the Elon White Paper on Experiential Learning. One recommendation encouraged alternative forms of grading be made available in experiential courses. We make the argument that service-oriented classes should and can be held to the same standards of other more traditional classes. Further, we suggest that experiential courses could be even more challenging than traditional classes due to the level of synthesis, analysis, and application of relevant knowledge. Best practices in experiential education suggest that connecting knowing with doing should include many higher order thinking skills such as synthesis and integration, and can be assessed by traditional academic means (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

### *Project Goals and Evaluation*

Over the past several years, SAT scores of entering Elon students have increased. It is clear that the academic aptitude of students has improved. Indeed, grades in our HUS 481 Internship suggest that our students could benefit from greater levels of academic challenge. The increase in student competence, campus-wide focus on academic challenge, and our commitment to academically linked internships prompted us to establish the following goals for the proposed project:

1. To reconfigure the Human Service Internship based upon the development of specific and measurable learning outcomes.

We plan to pay careful attention to civic engagement outcomes, an area valued by our profession, but not previously assessed by our department. We currently have course goals, but do not have specific learning outcomes. We plan to examine learning outcomes of other disciplines, such as social work, which also integrate field-based learning into their curriculum.

2. To develop new assignments or revise assignments currently in place in an effort to increase academic challenge as well as assess the newly developed learning outcomes.

We will develop or revise assignments related to internship in consultation with 2-3 seniors who have completed internship the previous spring. These students will be able to provide feedback about the feasibility and effectiveness of certain assignments as well as describe the strengths and weaknesses of the existing course.

3. To assess the effectiveness of our re-conceptualized Internship by comparing performance across sections of internship on our senior assessment measures.

Last spring the Human Services department revised our senior assessment and developed specific learning outcomes for 3 of the goals in our major: critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and cultural competence. We have already collected performance data from last year's graduating seniors which will provide a baseline to compare the seniors who participate in the revised version of Internship.

Community-based learning is an integral part of the curriculum within Human Services. It is imperative that community-based courses establish high academic standards. Internship is a senior capstone experience and needs to be re-conceptualized to address improving student quality and concerns related to academic challenge. The term "internship" as a course title in itself may be called into questions as we re-conceptualize this course. We have found that students assume that internships are about "doing" and do not enter these courses with the expectation of encountering significant academic work. Indeed, many students have never thought of internship as a course. We will consider alternative course titles that may be more useful in setting appropriate student expectations.

### *Implications for Dissemination*

This project has broad implications for dissemination. Many departments struggle with the integration of academic content and academic challenge into internship and other experientially-based courses. The development of a model that challenges students to reach beyond their current level of performance in an internship setting based upon learning outcomes could transform the manner in

which internships are taught both within and outside our own discipline. Our findings could be presented through faculty development workshops at CATL or Numen Lumen. At the national level, we could present at the National Society for Experiential Education and International Service-Learning Research Conference. We could publish findings through our disciplinary journal, *Human Service Education* as well as journals focused on a broader audience such as *The Journal of Experiential Education*. Additionally, this approach to internships can be applied to our other experientially-based courses, HUS 111 and HUS 381.

It is clear that Elon University has a vested interest in enhancing academic challenge. Additionally, Elon seeks to become a national leader in experiential and service-learning and has expressed a desire to carefully examine the senior year experience. Emphasis on the senior year dovetails with the goal to help seniors articulate the skills they have developed throughout the major. The development of a model for senior internship addresses all three of these priorities.

#### *Timeline and Budgetary Needs*

We are requesting that the CATL scholar funds be used in a creative manner to allow two senior faculty the opportunity to participate in this innovative project. First, neither applicant can afford the accompanying course release due to administrative and other programmatic commitments. We therefore request the money typically spent to pay an adjunct (\$8,000) be used as summer funding for each applicant. Second, one of the applicants will be teaching HUS 481 Internship in Fall 2007. This necessitates summer work. Internship begins the second week of October which gives us the first five weeks of the fall semester to consult with students and continue work on the Internship syllabus.

This course is central to the teaching of both applicants. Indeed, we have an extensive history of collaboration related to service-learning research. We have received a Carnegie Grant and a Project Interweave grant based upon research in experiential learning. Both grants successfully integrated students into the projects. Additionally, one applicant has written a textbook regarding internship in the discipline. We believe we can complete the project following the timeline suggested below.

### Summer and Fall 2007

- Review current syllabus
- Develop specific learning outcomes
- Consult with seniors who have already completed internships
- One applicant will teach HUS 481 Internship in Human Services and gather data about student performance based upon our senior assessment. (See Project Goals and Evaluation section.)

### Summer and Fall 2008

- Review data gathered from HUS 481 taught in Fall 2007
- Refine current assignments or develop new assignments based upon learning goals
- Develop rubrics for revised or new assignments
- Fully implement re-conceptualized HUS 481
- One applicant will teach HUS 481 Internship in Human Services and gather data about student performance based upon our senior assessment

### Spring 2009

- Compare student performance on senior assessment between Spring 2006, Fall 2007, and Fall 2008
- Evaluate student performance on newly developed and implemented internship learning outcomes
- Disseminate findings at appropriate conferences

### *Budget*

#### Summer - Fall 2007

Applicant 1	\$4000
Applicant 2	\$4000
3 senior consultants (3 x \$ 200)	\$ 600
Supplies	\$ 200

#### Summer 2008 - spring 2009

Applicant 1	\$4000
Applicant 2	\$4000
Travel to conferences	\$2000

## References

- Eyler, J. & Giles, D. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Payne, S., Kleine, K., Purcell, J., & Carter, G. (2005). Evaluating academic challenge beyond the NSSE. *Innovative Higher Education*, 30, 129-146.