Faculty Learning Community (FLC)

A Proposal for the Improvement of Collaboration Among Co-op & Internship Students

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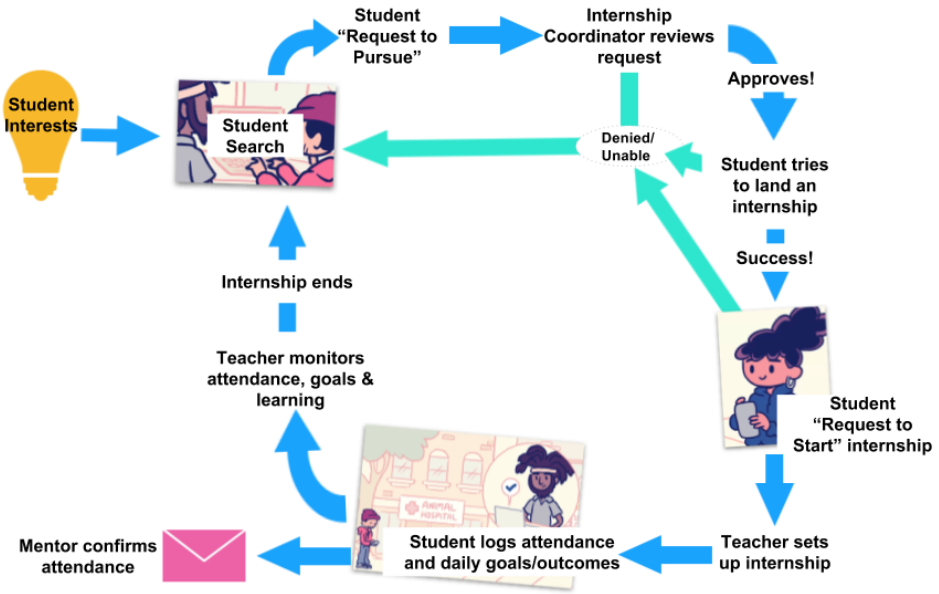
Abstract

This effort will design for avenues that will encourage Industry leaders to scale up internship/coop opportunities for all students - especially in the STEM fields. This proposal will identify innovative ways to recruit students to increase enrollment in academic courses specifically designed for internships and co-ops. The faculty will also identify tools and methods to encourage mentorship among students enrolled in internship and co-op experiences that will strengthen their sense of community and long term professional growth. The faculty will test a roll out of a tool and method for students in 2021 and solicit feedback for taking next steps.

Project Description

The project will involve creating a method for students to interact with each other across disciplines while completing their internships and co-ops. Once implemented, the faculty will solicit feedback from the students regarding their experience and determine next steps for the method going forward. The project will also explore ideas for increasing industry partner driven events that will increase the number of students participating in internships and co-ops, with the end result being a continued pipeline for partners and students participating in these experiences. The final result of the project will be a recommendation for a tool to allow internship and co-op students to communicate while in their experience and a list of proposed ideas for increasing the number of experiences accepted by KSU students (the increase will be determined by the number of students applying for credit through Handshake).

The typical internship cycle can be different for students (1, ImBlaze). The image below depicts the typical cycle:



(Figure 1)

Our Faculty Learning Community explored several tools for building a community for students in STEM related internships to share their portfolios and ideas from their experiences. As described in the abstract, the idea is to first and foremost create a sense of community among students in internship and co-op experiences. With the additional challenges of the pandemic and students shifting to a remote learning and working environment, the sense of community is even more important than in a traditional on-site internship setting. From conversations with students over the summer of 2020, Professor Dawn Tatum states that "many of the students were excited to have opportunities, but left feeling isolated and alone. For many of the students, this was their first job in industry and they wanted to collaborate and talk to others that were interns as well as full time employees on a regular basis. Some companies made the shift to remote learning well and were able to provide an organized schedule of check-ins, project meetings and social meetups that helped the students to cope and engage

throughout the remote internship. Other companies struggled in the transition and the students struggled. They still had great experiences, but could have learned a great deal more had the environment been more structured and organized" (2, Tatum). The Faculty Learning Community explored several tools to determine their usability from the academic perspective to build a community space. We explored the tools Axiom Mentor and wizeHive and received demos of each of these, which both seem to focus more on the process management of the internship, which we as a university already have Handshake to assist with that portion of the experience. ImBlaze Internship Management System was a third option we looked at and received a more in depth demo of the product. It still seems to be a product focuses on the management of the internship with some ability to build in socialization. Of the three products we explored, ImBlaze was the most appealing. We explored ImBlaze as a possible tool and looking at the deployments they have in their portfolio, it is impressive and customizable. They set up the 10 Expectations (as seen in Figure 2)

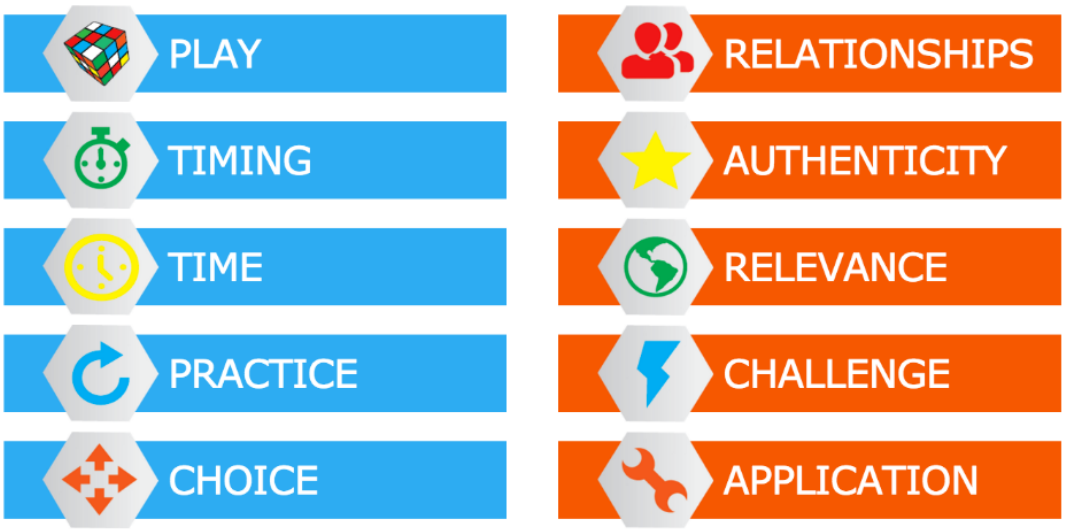


Figure 2

that determine if our program is really listening to what our students want out of an internship program. While we use Handshake to support our students in finding job opportunities, we really do not

have an active community tool that will support them once they find a job beyond our academic courses which are by necessity separated by degrees.

We also talked to industry partners and students to receive their input. We had a discussion with Dean Matthews, Senior Director of Learning and Development, at InComm. Dean Matthews' internship program has been recognized by the state of Georgia as one of the best in the state in terms of organization and program development. The experiences InComm provides for students allows them to flourish in many different areas of the company to help the students decide which career path in technology might be the best for them. InComm also encourages the interns to build a community of peers and share thoughts on their experiences. They use the tool Confluence to create a place where the InComm interns can show off the work they are doing and talk with other interns about their academic work as well. Dean Matthews has told me in past conversations that converting interns to full time employees is one of the main goals of the internship program. When interns feel as though they are a part of something and have a sense of belonging, they are more likely to remain. The interns set up and configure the Confluence platform and run it themselves, which also gives them ownership of the community. The Confluence platform is based more on sharing ideas and projects, but helps to build community by doing so. Everything is organized by pages or spaces (as seen in Figure 3).

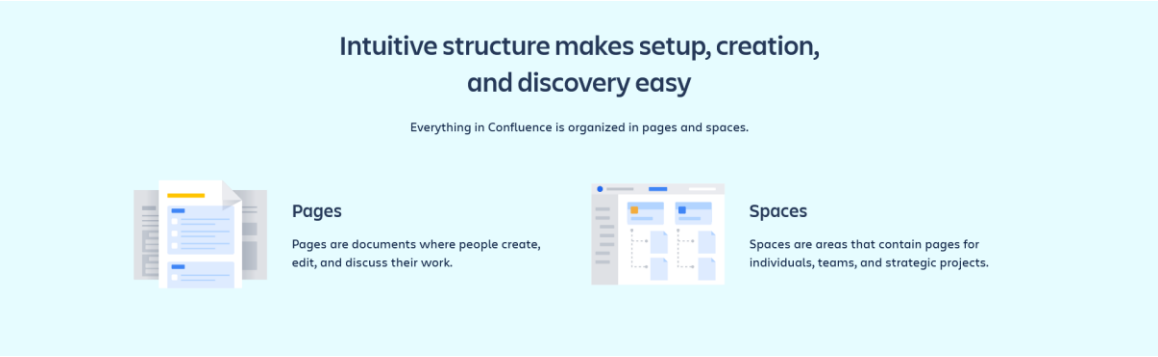


Figure 3

Confluence also offers templates in many of the areas we were interested in that lead to easy implementation (as seen in Figure 4).

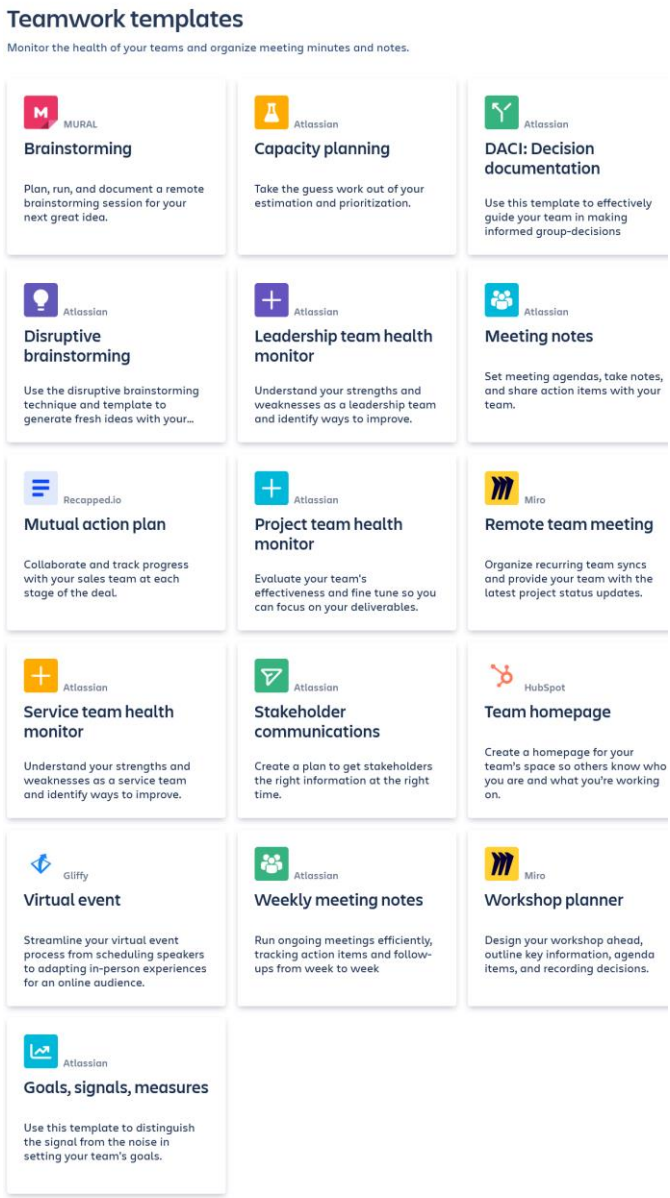


Figure 4

In Conclusion, we heard from industry partners and from students that a platform where more social interaction could take place would be a positive endeavor. In our community, we feel as though focusing on the students' aspect is the **first step**. Benefits to an Internship (STEM or otherwise) would be:

- Building a sense of belonging to the University
- Networking with students in all majors
- Collaborative Interactions among all majors
- Leading to increased participation in internships

As a side benefit, the academic advisors who are working with the students would also be able to network with each other and learn more about the different types of internships that students are involved in which could lead to collaborative work or research in certain areas. The **second step** in this implementation could be to allow for all students to have access to join the community but in a limited capacity. They would have access to a particular channel or group to ask questions. The **third step** could be implementing the ability for industry partners and/or alumni to also join the community for the purposes of mentorship or hiring. While this step could lead to complications and may have a negative impact on student interactions, there may be a way to allow industry to engage on a limited or restricted basis. This engagement could also be monetized so that industry partners who wish to have access to students who have completed internships is considered premium access. The consensus in discussion in the learning community is that this access may be more appropriately done through a portfolio management system that is separate from the Internship Community.

We were unable to implement a pilot test of a community for internships during this past year due to the cost of the software, resources required to implement and the communication that would need to take place at higher levels of administration in support of such an endeavor. Our plans were very ambitious from the start. We are still very hopeful that such an endeavor can take place and several members of the community would like to be a part of the pilot, should it take place. The College of Computing and Software Engineering along with the Southern Polytechnic College of Engineering and Engineering Technology are very much committed to the success of our student interns and want to increase the number of students receiving credit and their sense of belonging. Many studies have shown that students who create a sense of belonging while they are in school will retain that sense when they graduate and remain connected as alumni (3, David & Cohen).

References

1. ImBlaze | Internship Management System. (2021, June 10). Retrieved from https://www.imblaze.org/home
2. Tatum, Dawn. Kennesaw State University, College of Computing and Software Engineering, Director of Partnerships and Engagements, Academic Coordinator of Internships.
3. David, Alexandra & Coenen, Frans. (2014). Alumni Networks - An Untapped Potential to Gain and Retain Highly-Skilled Workers?. Higher Education Studies. 4. 10.5539/hes.v4n5p1.

Figures & End Notes

1. Figure 1. ImBlaze | Internship Management System. (2021, June 10). Retrieved from https://www.imblaze.org/home
2. Figure 2. 10 EXPECTATIONS. (2021, July 02). Retrieved from https://www.bigpicture.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=389378&type=d&pREC_ID=902773
3. Figure 3. Atlassian. (2021, July 01). Confluence - Features | Atlassian. Retrieved from https://www.atlassian.com/software/confluence/features
4. Figure 4. Atlassian. (2021, July 01). Teamwork | Atlassian. Retrieved from https://www.atlassian.com/software/confluence/templates/categories/teamwork