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Assessing the Internship Experience: Practical Application of Knowledge to Support Program Learning Outcomes

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Today fashion internships are under more scrutiny than ever from the U.S. Department of Labor. While the Fair Labor Standards Act requires employees to be paid, there are exceptions when an intern is receiving an educational experience. The specifics of that experience, however, are not well defined for fashion firms, and some doubt the worth of internships (Bellafante, 2012). Despite the controversy, an internship experience featuring substantive work remains an important stepping-stone for the student pursuing a career in fashion. Fashion firms offer experiences to students that cannot be recreated in the classroom. Evaluation of the skills displayed during the internship experience, if measured properly, can be an important assessment tool for fashion programs. A supervisor's review upon an internship's completion allows program faculty to see the quality of a student's skills through the eyes of an unbiased third party. Most importantly, this third party person is an industry professional who should have a good understanding of the current needs and expectations employers will have as they hire new graduates.

Linda Suskie discusses supervisor evaluations in her book *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* (2009, p. 8). She says of the internship experience that "supervisors' ratings of [interns'] performance can be powerful evidence of the overall success of a program in achieving its major learning goals. Rubrics make it easy for supervisors to provide this information." The rubric can easily be integrated into a supervisor's end-of-internship evaluation of the student. Suskie recommends using a ratings scale and/or comments as direct assessment measures (2009). These assessment measures, paired with other direct and indirect assessment tools utilized within the fashion program, can form a comprehensive assessment plan that easily reflects student learning.

Once the program learning goals are set, faculty must decide which of those goals can be measured through the internship experience. When those are determined, an appropriate supervisor evaluation form must be created. Interns at Stephens College are required to use the text *The Fashion Intern* (2010) by Michele Granger. The book includes an employer evaluation that served as the basis for our supervisor evaluation. We have customized it to fit our assessment needs and required it be used at the end of the internship. All supervisor evaluations were tabulated when received and point values were given that were figured into students' grades. We created an assessment spreadsheet and scores from the evaluations were entered into the spreadsheet. Only portions of the evaluations that were tied to assessment were scored. In our method, there were multiple questions that make up a content area such as "work habits." Each question included a ratings scale with 5 being exceptional, 2 below average and 1 meaning that the supervisor did not observe any interactions that met the question criteria. After all of the

