

### Expanding Internship: A New Take on University Approaches

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#### Abstract

In a world in which experiential learning is becoming increasingly vital, it is important for educators and students to explore the many possible avenues that this kind of learning can take. Although traditionally this kind of learning has found its most obvious outlets in co-op placements and business-sector internships, there is much that we can do in our own institutions to foster rich experiences that expand students' abilities to gain important skills. This study encourages those in administrative and teaching positions in universities to think more broadly of the benefits of certain kinds of internship placements, not just for the students involved, but also the supervisors. As a case study, we present not only the backdrop to a unique internship but the tangible benefits that accrued from the relationships forged within it.

**Keywords:** Internship; Experiential; Administration

Experiential learning is not just a worldwide phenomenon; it is also one that has special emphasis in the Canadian maritime region.<sup>1</sup> The Atlantic Provinces have realized that this is the next big wave in education, and have accordingly developed a task force within the region to make it a hub for experiential learning.<sup>2</sup> An Experiential Learning working group has developed a task force in New Brunswick, specifically, uniting universities, government, students and the economic (business and non-profit) sectors to collaborate on expanding experiential learning in New Brunswick's universities. As their preliminary report states, the Provincial government aimed to "significantly expand the number of post-secondary students that gain relevant career experience while attending school."<sup>3</sup> Among the ways that

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Prince Edward Island. (2010) *Proceedings of the Minister's Summit on Learning*. Ministry of Early Education and Childhood Development; University of New Brunswick. (2014) *Experiential Education: New Opportunities for Transforming the Student Experience*. Bi-Campus Steering Committee; Halifax Global Inc. Department of Labour and Advanced Education (2015) *University System Visioning Consultations: Final Report*. Halifax: Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education; Government of New Brunswick. "Investment in Experiential Learning Opportunities for University Students." Press Release, June 14, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> New Brunswick Task Force on Experiential Learning. (2016) *Final Report of the Task Force on Experiential Learning*. Government of New Brunswick.

<sup>3</sup> Government of New Brunswick. (2016) *The New Brunswick Economic Growth Plan: September 2016*. Fredericton: New Brunswick, p.13.

New Brunswick has defined experiential learning is that it is exclusively off-campus, engaging with experiential learning partners including New Brunswick companies, community organizations and government. "In the workplace" is defined broadly to include many different kinds of organizations but not the university itself. The work must be compensated, either financially or by academic credit, inclusive of co-op, internship, community service learning, practicum/clinical placements and co-curricular activities. The government has been particularly interested in engaging visible minorities, Indigenous students, international students and other under-represented groups in this program. However, this definition, although it seems broad and inclusive, leaves out one of the most important places where experience can take place: the administrative offices of universities. The internship described here has been carried out for three years with three separate Interns to the Dean of Arts.

## **Context**

I (Elizabeth A. Wells) have been supervisor of the internship as a Full Professor in the Department of Music at Mount Allison University, the Pickard-Bell Chair in Music, and the Dean of Arts at the institution from 2016 to 2018. A 3M National Teaching Fellow, I have been developing active learning strategies for students for some time, as well as leading the Department of Music acting in an administrative role for approximately ten years. When I was the Head of Music, I engaged student assistants who helped with events, administrative tasks, and research. There are three Deans who serve at Mount Allison, one for each of the faculties of Arts, Sciences, and Social Sciences. The Dean acts as the "middle person" between department Head and the Vice President, Academic and Research. There are no associate or assistant deans, and there is one secretary shared amongst five administrators. When I went in to this position in 2016, it seemed clear that there was a pressing need for some assistance, but there was no place to find it. At a gathering of students that year, I announced that I was going to be named Dean of Arts beginning in July. Branden Olsen, who would go on to pioneer this position, immediately remarked that he could become my assistant. Since there was no such position, I advised him that this seemed a great idea but not viable. There would surely be many confidential things that I would have to deal with as Dean. How could I include him in a "shadowing" type of position? He pressed the issue, and we decided first to make it an independent study in academic administration. The proposal for such a study was rejected on the basis that it does not fit into any department or program of the university. Undaunted, we decided to pursue the internship as a volunteer position whereby Branden could learn about academic administration in his spare time. When I introduced him to the President, Robert Campbell, Dr. Campbell immediately asked what I was paying him. When he found out we had no budget, he generously offered to fund the position through the Campbell-Verduyn Fund at the University. And so the first Campbell-Verduyn Intern to the Dean of Arts was named.

## **The Independent Study**

It was important to me as an instructor, and to Branden as the first Intern, that whatever we did was undergirded by theory. I devised a syllabus that incorporated aspects of time management, university governance, administrative skills and a background on universities themselves. Assignments primarily focused on reaction papers to readings, and helping to run various events. Initial readings by Parker Palmer and *The Academic Administrator's Handbook* were followed by ideas on documenting performance and learning, specifically through an Administrative Portfolio. For context on running an organization, and especially an Arts organization, Branden read Jim Collins' *Good to Great*, and *Making Ideas Happen* by Scott Branson. Bolman's *Reframing Academic Leadership* and Pawlak's *Engaging the Six Cultures of the Academy* provided further food for thought. Finally, Branden embarked on an independent project focusing on the senior year experience. Meetings every two weeks and some

reaction papers to the readings kept the independent study on track. Aspects of the independent study were included for other interns as the project unfolded over a few years.

### **The Internship Growth**

What fascinated us all about the internship was its ability to generate more learning for more students over time. When I selected my second intern, by interview, Branden helped to establish the parameters of the interviews as well as helping to draft the call for interest. When I had selected the second intern, there was a period of co-mentorship during which each of us coached and trained the new intern. It gave Branden experience in training and mentoring after going through the same process with me. We eventually travelled to Hong Kong and Cambridge, UK, to co-present on the internship and experiential learning, which was a wonderful way to encapsulate and disseminate our experience to other constituencies. We gave a Rotary talk in Sackville which prompted some press coverage, and we also had a press release from Mount Allison that profiled the internship itself and led to web coverage on the university's home page. Branden was even recognized on the street by a prospective student who had seen the profile of the young singer on the site. Ultimately, the work evolved into this presentation and publication.

### **BRANDEN OLSEN: ABOUT ME**

Branden Olsen is an Atlantic Canadian baritone who graduated from Mount Allison University with a Bachelor of Music in 2017. He is currently pursuing a master's degree at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Branden is the co-creator of the Dean of Arts internship program at Mount Allison.

The internship consisted of many elements. The first, and perhaps most important element, was that of the independent study. The independent study would consist of topics such as management, organization, university planning, governance and an independent research portion. All things that relate to university administration and academia but are not necessarily taught outright in a wide variety of programs across the university.

The second largest aspect of the internship was the creation of a university wide committee known as the "Students' Council to the Dean of Arts," a committee designed to deal with various issues students in the Arts face and to come up with creative ways to help these students thrive. It became the intern's job to chair this group and direct its output.

Another important aspect of the internship was the number of events that the Dean of Arts initiates. It was an immensely beneficial experience as the intern is tasked with various levels of duties from communication to the running of the actual event. Some sample events include: The Arts Retreat, Teaching and Learning Summit, talk shows, and Arts Research Day. Lastly, the internship provides the opportunity for the intern to dig into their own ingenuity, as the internship promotes the freedom to come up with creative ideas.

### **KAYE KLAPMAN: ABOUT ME**

Noah Fry, a Philosophy, Politics and Economics student, was the second student to hold the Internship in the 2017/18 scholastic year. His interpretation of the position included a great deal of policy writing, an area in which he excels. He was succeeded by Kaye Klapman in September of 2018.

At the time, Kaye was completing her second Mount Allison degree; after graduating with a Bachelor of Music in voice a few months earlier, she was a Psychology student during her internship. She was working as a private singing teacher in Sackville and applying to graduate programs in Psychology and Neuroscience. Kaye's research interests have always fallen at the intersection of Music and Psychology, with an emphasis on music neuroscience. She will start a Master's of Science in Neuroscience at Western in the fall of 2019, and is working on publishing a paper in Music Cognition with a former Mount Allison professor.

### **THREE GENERATIONS IN**

By the time Kaye became the third Intern, the position had expanded in scope and complexity. If Branden's internship had been primarily about establishing the position and Noah's had been about writing and implementing policy, Kaye used her term to explore arts administration and project management.

Like fellow Music student Branden, Kaye had previously studied under Dr. Wells. Now that the internship was more established, Kaye was given the opportunity to further develop the Intern's reach by organizing and running major administrative projects. As the Intern, Kaye helped with the orientation session specific to Music, Fine Arts and Drama students. As a former Music student, she made a presentation to the incoming class, and otherwise acted as Dr. Wells' assistant in keeping the various activities on schedule and ensuring all the materials were available. This was her first experience on being behind the podium during a University event. Kaye was provided with a behind-the-scenes look at the effort and time required to organize events of that scale, which prepared her to manage her own projects.

Her first independent assignment was the Arts START program: this peer-taught student success course, aimed at incoming Arts students, was a pilot project that Dr. Wells asked Kaye to project manage. It was a steep – and very valuable – learning curve. As project manager, Kaye was responsible for establishing online enrollment protocols for new students, contacting all incoming Arts students and fielding their questions, connecting with and helping to hire student tutors, facilitating and sometimes teaching weekly tutor training sessions, booking rooms for tutoring sessions, and a variety of other functional and administrative tasks. Dr. Wells trusted her to make decisions independently, handle problems as they arose and ask for help if needed. Kaye was the only student manager of the course, which in other departments was facilitated by staff members.

During his time as the Intern, Branden had founded the Dean's Council for the Arts, an initiative that Noah had successfully maintained. Kaye became Chairperson of the third Council in September. While establishing membership was tricky, involving tracking down the student presidents of the many Arts departmental societies, once the Council was united it immediately began to make progress.

The Council's most successful initiative was an interdepartmentally-led haunted house fundraiser. "Haunted Hart," hosted in Mount A's purportedly haunted Hart Hall building, was the result of cooperation and teamwork amongst eight different Arts societies. Kaye operated as the neutral facilitator and liaison with the student government and administration; Haunted Hart provided her with an excellent opportunity to take a more supervisory role in a complex event. She had a wonderful time playing the ghost of former voice professor Ethel Peake during the event, which was a big hit and raised \$600 for a Canadian literacy charity.

Over the course of the semester, the Arts Intern position provided Kaye with opportunities to sharpen her administrative skills and to witness – and even contribute to – the hidden workings of an academic institution. Under Dr. Wells’ direction, she began to explore works on arts administration. The internship provided her with the knowledge and confidence to approach administrative challenges and will undoubtedly improve her experience as a future graduate student.

## **Conclusion**

This internship provided incredibly valuable experiences to these students who otherwise would not have been exposed to the inner workings of a busy Arts faculty. But more importantly, the Dean found that having this “second brain” that helped with all kinds of events, initiatives and projects took some of the pressure off what is a demanding role in the institution. We were able to do more, more effectively and more efficiently, and at the same time created a better sense of work/life balance in the Dean’s life. Having veritable “middle managers” who were also sometimes “CEOs” of the projects allowed everyone to find different roles for themselves in the institution and the internship. Ultimately all departments of universities could create internship opportunities for students and there is no reason why more institutions could not take advantage of this kind of program.

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**Branden Olsen.** Branden is a singer, Master's student at Memorial University and a graduate of the Bachelor of Music program at Mount Allison University. He co-created the Internship with Dr. Wells and served as a mentor to the following two Interns. [bcolsen@mta.ca](mailto:bcolsen@mta.ca)

**Sarah (Kaye) Klapman.** Kaye finished her Psychology courses in December and graduated in May with a Bachelor of Music degree in voice from Mount Allison University. She is the third student to hold the Intern position. [sfklapman@mta.ca](mailto:sfklapman@mta.ca)