

CHAPTER 8

Assessment in Internships: A 360-Degree Review for Students, Supervisors, and Professors

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In this chapter we focus on the value of assessment for internships and experiential education. While most educators incorporate assessment of the internship and focus solely on the student, we take a broader and more holistic approach here, adapting an approach known as the “360-degree review” for interns, their supervisors, and professors. We share recommendations for effective assessment of internships and related internship courses.

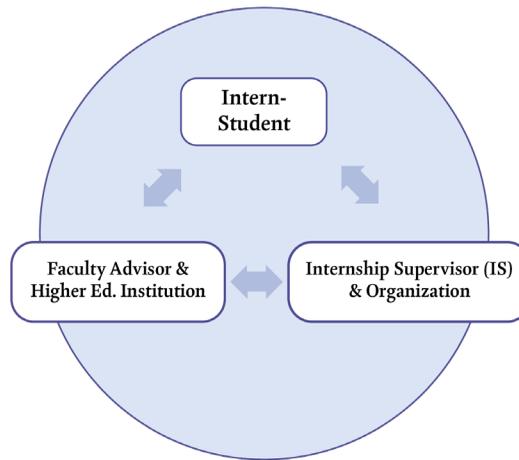
INTRODUCTION

Internships have become a near-essential component of undergraduate education. At the same time, assessment in higher education has increasingly gained attention (DiLoretto, Pellow, and Stout 2017) and in fact is required by state and regional accrediting bodies (Gaston 2018). In this chapter we delineate best practices in assessment of internships and advocate adapting the 360-degree feedback approach to internship assessment.

The phrase “360-degree feedback” became popular in the 1990s as a more integrated and comprehensive approach to employee assessment (Edwards and Ewan 1996). By 2016, Bracken, Rose and Church wrote that 360-degree feedback was “embedded in many of our human resources (HR) processes applied at individual, group, and organizational levels. The practice of 360° Feedback has been around so long now that we are all comfortable with it.” (2016, 761). It is also important that students gain an understanding and competency with this approach to prepare them for assessment in the workplace.

Our approach adapts 360-degree feedback to assessment for and of different internship stakeholders as shown in figure 1.¹ Naturally, we expect the intern to be assessed by the internship supervisor (IS) and by the faculty advisor who establishes course requirements such as journals and informational interview papers. However, it’s valuable to expand assessment beyond the intern’s performance. We also expect the student to assess the internship supervisor and the broader experience at the internship, as well as the faculty advisor through the use of enhanced course evaluations. Finally, we recommend that the faculty advisor provides feedback to the internship supervisor and vice versa. The more feedback that occurs among the stakeholders, the better the experience will be for the current intern, future interns, and the experiential education program.

Through various means, including the internship contract and midterm and exit assessments, the faculty member should work with the internship supervisor and the student to promote academic and career development. In this chapter we argue that the internship stakeholders can maximize their ef-

Figure 1: 360-Degree Assessment: Key stakeholders assess each other

fectiveness when operating within a comprehensive assessment approach and strong educational infrastructure that is formed by online student self-assessment, an internship contract, student course assessment, and faculty and IS assessment of the intern (also see figure 2).

The 360-Degree Review for Internship Stakeholders: The Roles of Students, Supervisors, and Professors in Experiential Learning

The primary stakeholders of an internship program include the intern (student), faculty advisor (professor), and the internship supervisor (IS) or the boss at the internship site: all three play essential roles in this experiential learning process. The college or university and the internship organization are also important stakeholders; these institutions should provide the resources and educational infrastructure to ensure appropriate assessment of the primary stakeholders.

Internship Supervisor (IS)

Essentially an IS is an educator and the IS plays a pivotal part in assessing students who are earning academic credit. Ideally, the IS supervises, instructs, and mentors while retaining a formal educational responsibility to evaluate the student intern. By supervising a real work experience for student interns, an IS not only facilitates professional networking opportunities but also develops a student's individual work skills and provides practical knowledge that animates classroom theory. Ultimately, an IS often will become a source for letters of recommendation, if not a first job offer. In exchange, an IS obtains needed labor, paying little or no wages; the IS also receives the new perspective and energy infused into the workplace by interns. The organization that hosts interns also benefits from increased visibility on college campuses and an enhanced organizational image in the larger community (True 2013). Although the IS is naturally oriented toward the organization, one can also play an important role in ensuring that the internship is not a part-time or summer job, but rather, an opportunity for students to gain valuable experience in a field while simultaneously taking a required course or seminar.

The academic credit for the internship is for learning, not just for doing (Batra 2001; Kent and Swift 2000). According to US law and as discussed by David Yamada in this volume, the primary point of a college internship is not lining up a first job, but rather, furthering the student's higher education (US Department of Labor 2010).² The IS can be instrumental in making sure genuine learning happens.

In fact, effective internship supervisors see themselves as educators and can fulfill this role best when college-run internship programs are well-run and empower the motivated IS with proper guidance. Our previous research on internship supervisors finds that they are serious educators and important assessors.³ As an experienced IS noted: "I absolutely feel as an internship supervisor that I am an

educator. I teach interns the system, how to do their job effectively. I give constructive criticism during their internship. And I hope that I teach that what you learn in class is not always applied the way you expect in the real world. I teach students not just the skills they need to do this job, but skills that will help them in any position they might have in the future.”⁴ In a strong partnership with the faculty advisor and credit-granting academic institutions, internship supervisors will continue to be excellent and memorable educators of students and important assessors of their internship work.

Faculty Advisors

Faculty advisors have been recognized as playing a complementary role in ensuring students are learning from their internships. Moore (2013) uses an analogy to make a critical point about the importance of faculty guidance during an internship, explaining that a literature professor would not assign a novel to students without sharing some literary theory, critical methods, as well as historical context. In other words, the professor must give students tools to study fiction effectively. Similarly, faculty advisors for an internship are responsible for sharing the appropriate tools for effectively learning from the internship experience: the students should be taught to examine, to analyze, and to critique the experience (Moore 2013). Simply reading a novel or holding down an internship can be accomplished without faculty providing the tools mentioned here. Yet, having a nuanced understanding of a novel or an internship and obtaining academic credit for developing such an understanding are quite different. Numerous studies have shown that, done correctly, experiential learning during an internship “leads to deeper, more nuanced understanding of [the] subject matter” (Eyler 2009, 27).

In fact, the faculty advisor is the lead stakeholder or quarterback for the internship 360-degree review, the internship experiential learning, and grade decision-making. Cantor (1995) defines experiential learning as “activities that engage the learner directly in the phenomena being studied” (1995, 1). As we have previously explained, experiential learning takes place in the world outside the classroom with a practitioner’s guidance and an educator’s oversight (Lowenthal and Sosland 2007). Fundamentally, experiential learning is an extension of classroom studies for which the student receives credit and it is the professor who has the final say on whether a student should receive that academic credit. To emphasize the academic nature of experiential learning and the central role for the faculty advisor, Whitaker (1989) lists five academic standards for ensuring quality assurance when awarding credit for experiential learning:

1. Credit should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
2. College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning.
3. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.
4. The determination of competence levels and credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.
5. Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted. (Whitaker 1989, xvii)

Internship learning is not an ad hoc process. Effective experiential learning requires the educator to create an infrastructure that relates the internship to the course topics (Sosland and Lowenthal 2017). The faculty advisor assigns analytical assignments designed to enhance students’ internship experience and to provide the framework within which to reflect, conceptualize, analyze, test, and apply ideas encountered outside the classroom. This educational infrastructure includes a faculty member providing thoughtful instruction, oversight, and evaluation for academic credit. The faculty member should establish clear learning objectives, which are spelled out in a syllabus or in an individualized study contract. Kent and Swift (2000) contend that “the key ingredient to internship success is effective faculty supervision” (36). Throughout the course of the semester, the faculty advisor should make certain the student is capable of performing at least a minimum of repetitive, clerical, or secretarial tasks (Batra 2001); ultimately, however, the full experience should be credit-worthy.

Even when the interns' duties are well defined and subject to evaluation, without help from faculty mentors and internship supervisors, students may not recognize the connection between the work they do in the internship and their academic work. For faculty, internships add value to their teaching when theories presented in class are connected to the interns' work environment. Cook, Parker, and Pettijohn argue that there is "general agreement that the internship experience help[s] students relate academic theories learned in the classroom to work-place experiences" (2004, 184). This connection is forged when students reflect on whether material covered in class or through individualized study relates to their internship responsibilities. Specifically, faculty may ask what theories individual interns are acting upon while performing daily tasks at their worksites. Alm recommends that students keep journals and question the "differences between what I [the intern] observed in the field and what I learned in class" (1996, 114). Keeping a journal helps students to reflect on their experiences and to make explicit connections between these two realms.

For effective 360-degree assessment, faculty should include varied assignments that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate what they have learned in their internships and faculty should elicit feedback from the internship supervisor and others at the internship site when possible. (We elaborate on potential assignments in the recommendations section of this chapter.) Faculty assessment of all internship course requirements remains a central part of the internship assessment process.

Aside from a faculty member's course-related responsibilities, there is also value in student assessments of faculty and the internship class in final course evaluations. In addition to standard prompts, internship course faculty should request that specific internship-related questions be asked by their institutions. This feedback should enable faculty to learn from students' insights and experiences and to adjust course content, such as by improving assignments and activities so that an internship course and the internship are coordinated and integrated experiential learning experiences (Beard 2007). Sample questions that could elicit this information include some of the following (posed with a standard agree-disagree Likert scale):

Questionnaire items relating to the value of the internship to the class:

- The internship experiential learning is interesting and stimulating.
- The internship experiential learning encourages students to think.
- The opportunity for group discussion of internships is valuable.

Questionnaire items relating to self-assessment:

- I gained a better understanding of myself through this class.
- I increased my awareness of my own interests and skills.
- I developed confidence in myself.

Questionnaire items relating to professional skills and attitudes

- I developed the specialized skills needed by professionals in this field.
- I learned about career opportunities.
- I developed a clearer sense of professional identity.⁵

Student Intern

Researchers have identified a variety of problems and solutions related to student interns. Some problems result from poor planning by the institution or inadequacies in administering the internship course; some are due to the interns themselves and their failures; and others may result from the internship supervisor.

Hite and Bellizzi (1986) suggest that internship programs need to be well planned and executed or students will have a negative experience. They note three key reasons for a suboptimal experience: unclear standards, misunderstandings or misrepresentation regarding the merits of the job, and misinformation by the organization regarding the duties required. For example, misunderstandings arise when a student fails to fully research an organization or to ask critical questions during the internship interview process, thus failing to ascertain if there is a good *fit* between the organization's expectations and the student's skills and preferences. In addition, the university may plan and administer internships

poorly, and the programs may be misunderstood by the organizations involved. This is the case where the organization wrongly regards interns as a free source of labor for clerical tasks and ignores the experiential learning objectives, as dramatized in Hollywood movies, popular magazine articles, and notable court cases that focus on abused or exploited interns (Hlavac and Easterly 2013; Scheiber 2015). In such cases, students can spend an entire semester engaged in menial tasks unrelated to their academic studies, such as answering the phone, filing, or doing a single repetitive task. Such an arrangement clearly does not warrant academic credit. Other common problems that plague a poorly organized internship effort include too many interns and insufficient work for each individual, inadequate workspace, an IS who is routinely out of the office or busy with other responsibilities, organizations that fail to prioritize assigning tasks to interns, and work that is unrelated to the intern's academic studies. Ultimately, poor planning can result in an unfortunate combination of boredom and frustration for the student.

Internships also fail because students lack specific skills expected of them by their IS. Without these skills, it is difficult if not impossible for IS's to fulfill their educational responsibilities. In fact, some potential interns "are not adept at speaking or writing" (Hartman et al. 2005, 348). Generally, according to Hartman et al. (2005), employers seek interns who understand the organization's mission and possess strong interpersonal skills, motivation, initiative, a strong work ethic, and an appreciation for teamwork. Employers complain that, unfortunately, many students lack one or more of these valuable skills. Moreover, some potential interns have fundamental problems that frustrate the IS, including those who lack maturity or are ignorant of workplace etiquette. Overall, many undergraduates and "new graduates have unrealistic expectations of the professional world" (Hartman et al. 2005, 348; Waters and Gilstrap 2012); they simply do not know how to survive, much less thrive, in an office environment. There are several ways these pitfalls can be addressed.

One approach is to incorporate student self-assessment from the outset. Prior to commencing their internship search, and with the help of faculty, students need to ask themselves some basic questions about their skill set, their strengths and weaknesses (in particular as they relate to their "career readiness"), and their goals for the internship. Students should also be challenged to think about big questions, including, "How do I find a job that I like or maybe even love?" "How do I balance my career with my family?" "How can I make a difference in the world?" and, "What do I want to grow into?" (Burnett and Evans 2016). By continuing self-assessment during the semester, students can gain clarity about what they want from an internship and they are better positioned to be successful in their search—and ultimately in their internship course and career. (A list of self-assessment questions can be found in the Supplemental Internship Resources.)⁶

Because professional skill development is pivotal for student success, it is also up to the faculty advisor and internship supervisor to help develop "career readiness" skills, such as effective critical thinking/problem solving, oral communication, written communication, teamwork/collaboration, digital technology, leadership, professionalism/work ethic, career management and global/intercultural fluency (NACE 2019).⁷ This could occur through mentorship (see Chapter 6 by Berg) or an internship class (see Chapter 5 by Simpson, Braam, and Winston).

Furthermore, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) recommends specific best practices for large and small organizations to promote coordination, mentoring, and in-house training during the internship. According to NACE's compendium of best practices (2020), internship work should be related to an intern's major, be challenging, and be recognized as valuable to the organization. The IS or the host organization should hold an orientation for interns so that, from the start, everyone is on the same page. Interns should receive a source (handbook or website) for answering frequently asked questions and delineating organizational rules. Ideally, an organization should have one person handling all matters relating to the organization's internship program, even if interns are supervised by a number of different persons in the organization. The host organization should offer in-house training for skills, which will benefit both the intern and the organization. Similarly, the organization should organize guest speakers and events that expose interns to the organizational culture. Finally, NACE indicates that an exit interview should be conducted to provide feedback from the student to the IS and vice versa (an assessment of the intern). Together, these best practices contribute to what NACE characterizes as a "premier internship program" (2020, 1).

The recommended practice of sharing feedback and evaluation is central to a student's internship experience; however, these practices are not always followed. In one of the few studies of internship

supervisors, Waters and Gilstrap (2012) focused on internship performance reviews, finding that when an IS provides “periodic and constructive feedback to interns,” the IS feedback has an important and positive impact on the intern’s learning experience (Waters and Gilstrap 2012, 27; also see: Sosland and Lowenthal 2017). Even so, they found that few internship supervisors held one-on-one meetings with students. They also noted that the intern’s academic institution often mandates that the IS complete a written assessment, yet their research found that the IS rarely reviews this valuable feedback with the student. Not surprisingly, interns want this one-on-one feedback from their IS (Rothman 2007).

Simply improving the assessment and feedback process, a duty that is central to the role of an effective internship supervisor, would improve the experience measurably for students. As explored elsewhere in this book, another way to improve communication is through the use of a college-provided contract to spell out duties and expectations on both sides. This tool effectively limits the abuse of free labor and formalizes the assessment process. When the intern, IS, and faculty advisor agree on a plan for the internship, they take an important step in establishing a 360-degree feedback strategy. Not only are expectations set, but also lines of communication are opened to ensure a clear pathway for assessment.

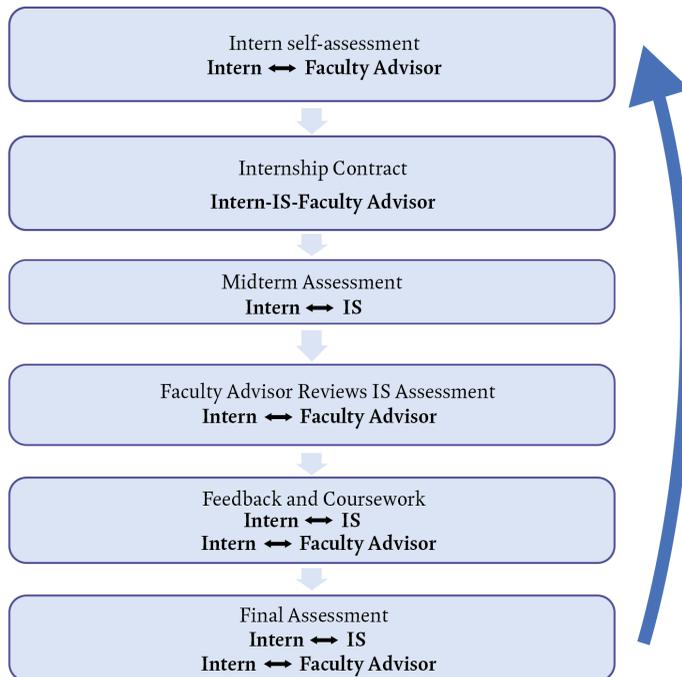
RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations we share below are based not only on our experience with internships, but also on a focus group and follow-up conversations with other faculty advisors. Collectively, the faculty have taught thousands of student interns over decades and across academic fields and subfields.⁸ Figure 2 illustrates the recommendations for assessment over the course of the semester, and figure 3 includes additional details about assessment undertaken by the stakeholders.

Assessment Resources Promoting Internship Preparation

First, faculty advisors must help students with the internship search and other pre-internship preparations, including student self-assessment. The faculty advisor should assure a good fit between students’ skills and professional desires on the one hand, and the needs and capabilities of the IS and the orga-

Figure 2: 360-Degree Assessment Process



nization on the other. In actively assisting students during their search, faculty should coach them on effective cover letters and résumés, as well as aid in identifying the types of organizations or firms to which they should apply. For all of the above to be effective, this process incorporates guiding students through self-reflection assessment to determine who they are and what their aspirations are, including insights into individual strengths and weaknesses, specifically those relating to skills.

Internship database. The educational institution should make available to students a database of internship opportunities that includes a brief description of personal responsibilities at each organization and previous interns' evaluations. The internship search in itself can be an excellent learning opportunity and the skills it helps develop will be useful throughout a student's professional career. One insight that emerged from the focus group was that a faculty advisor, using class discussion and assignments, must motivate students to reflect carefully upon their internship and career goals, passions, and priorities. Students should be motivated to ask themselves: "What do I want from my internship experience?"

Focused search for a placement. To answer this question and to prepare for job interviews, students should carefully do their homework in connection with the search. They must uncover as much information as possible about the organization. Faculty ought to push students to look up the organization's website, annual reports, previous interns' assessments, and other materials using databases available through the university. The faculty advisor should emphasize that the intern is interviewing the organization as much if not more than the reverse.

Preparing students to work in professional settings. Both the faculty advisor and the internship supervisor should do more to prepare interns for the professional and social expectations they will face during the internship. The interview is a critical opportunity for the intern to gather information about the prospective employer's expectations. The IS ought to address duties and the scope of the work, the number of other interns who will also be working in the office, and what a typical day would likely involve. The intern should be prepared to answer questions such as, "Do you have the skills and background required for this internship and will you fit into the organization's culture?" More specifically, interns should be prepared to answer the following standard interview question: "Tell me about yourself and why should I hire you?"

The faculty advisor should also brief students on key skills and workplace norms in order to increase their odds of success. Before the internship begins, the faculty advisor should explain professional conduct (see also Chapter 5): be reliable, punctual, and courteous; wear proper office attire; take initiative; be attentive to detail; and always behave as a team player. As noted earlier, students must possess the prerequisite skills and knowledge so that the IS can spend the time and energy to teach other important workplace skills, such as professionalism and teamwork/collaboration. Faculty advisors and internship supervisors know what is expected of interns and should share that knowledge in a strategic way to increase the opportunities for success. Again, without an honest and thorough self-assessment, this part of the process is less likely to be either educationally or professionally successful.

Transparency and the Internship Contract

Second, the contract will also serve as a basis for the performance assessment the IS will complete in the middle and at the end of the term. To clarify expectations by all stakeholders and to minimize future misunderstandings, the college internship program should require the intern, internship supervisor, and faculty advisor to sign an internship contract (see samples in the Supplemental Internship Resources section). As described above, so that everyone has the same understanding and expectations about what will take place during the semester, students should have a detailed discussion with the IS concerning their duties before signing the contract. The discussion and contract will help all sides avoid misunderstandings and disappointment later in the term. As our focus group participants discussed, the IS—not the student or professor—should be the one who writes up the responsibilities in the internship contract. The internship contract should specify that a majority of an intern's time on the job must be devoted to substantive activity that relates to their college coursework. In addition, the contract must clearly state the days of the week and the total number of hours per week the student will spend at the internship. The IS must understand that the student has other academic obligations to fulfill and that the internship is (generally) only part-time. Unless the expectations of the internship are clearly spelled

out in the internship contract, it is not possible to do a fair and complete assessment of the intern or the internship organization.⁹

Connecting Classroom Theory to Internship Practice

Third, a partnership between the IS and faculty advisor will facilitate connections between theory and practice. The IS should be encouraged (before taking on interns) to plan for training and setting up interns to succeed. Ideally, the training would include an orientation for all interns in the organization, an official handbook of rules, and information about professional development training resources that are available. This point was strongly agreed to among faculty advisors, but it was understood that smaller organizations might be limited in their capacity to implement all elements recommended by NACE. If the organization is too small to follow all best practices, then the faculty advisor will need to fill the void when it comes to job preparation. On site, the IS should also develop assignments for the intern that provide mutual benefits to the organization and to the intern. During the internship, the faculty advisor should act as a liaison between the student and the IS, when necessary. Being in contact with both the student and the IS, the faculty advisor is in a strong position to troubleshoot before problems become irreconcilable. The focus group discussed the value of site visits by the faculty advisor, especially for first-time internship organizations or supervisors. The faculty advisor should make course material, such as the syllabus, available to the IS to better understand what the intern is covering in class and in the intern's major and to assist the IS in connecting the internship experience to the classroom work. Ultimately, the IS's assessment of the intern should help the faculty advisor determine the student's grade.

Formal Assessments and Informal Check-ins

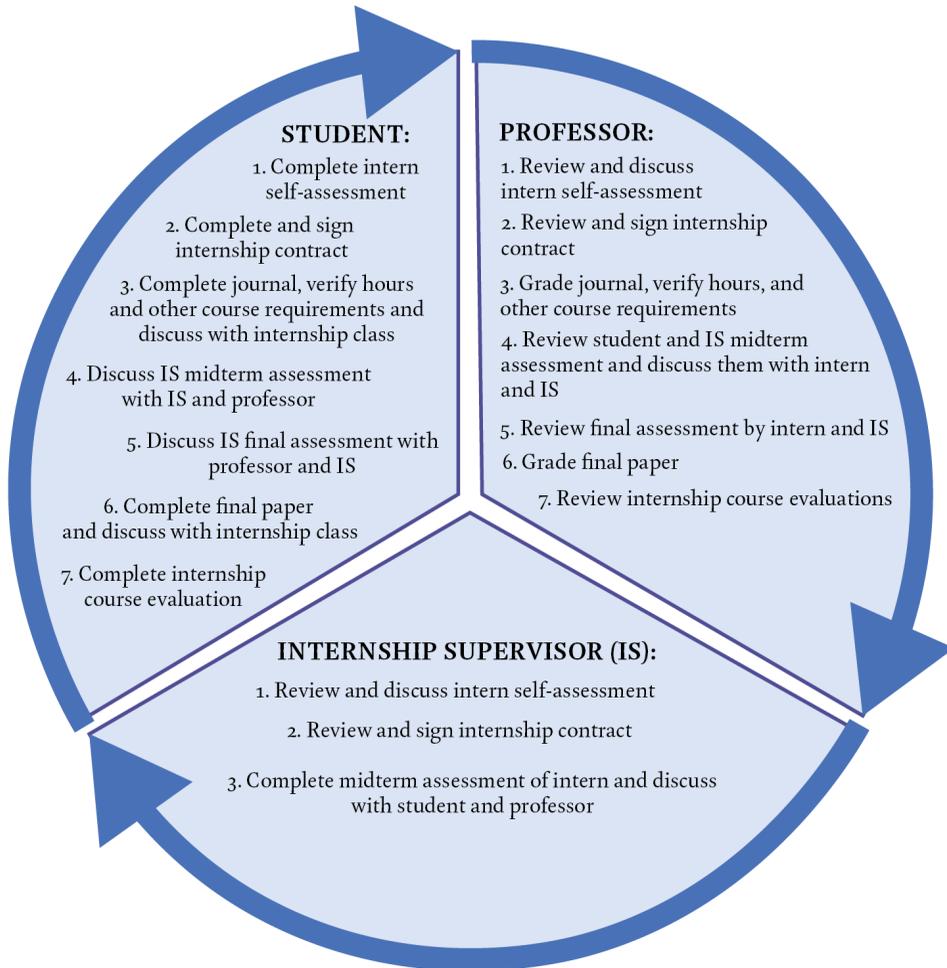
Formal assessments are essential not only at the end of the internship, but also midway through the semester. The IS should complete a written assessment and the intern should have an opportunity to discuss the assessment with the IS and (separately) with the faculty advisor. As faculty we know the value of receiving constructive feedback and responding in a professional environment. That is exactly the type of skill we hope students will develop in an internship. When students have the opportunity to respond to midterm feedback, we have found improvement in specific skills and overall performance (Lowenthal and Morrill Bijeau 2016). NACE offers sample assessment forms for the internship supervisor to use when evaluating the student.¹⁰

Beyond the formal assessments, we recommend that faculty check in with Internship Supervisors, ideally in the first half of the term. Sometimes the IS may wish to avoid putting certain concerns in writing or may not have time to write up complete assessments for outstanding interns. An email, phone call, or virtual check-in allows the IS and the faculty advisor to connect and share feedback about specific students as well as the broader internship experience. Regular communication between the IS and the faculty advisor effectively closes one part of the loop in the 360-degree feedback pathways introduced in figure 1.

Finally, the student should have the opportunity to assess the internship (IS and organization) as well as the faculty advisor/course to close the remaining spaces in the 360-degree feedback loop. Students can provide valuable information to the IS and internship site about their experience. They can share details about successful and unsuccessful aspects of the internship; when possible, internship organizations may revise their plans for future interns based on such feedback. Students can also share valuable feedback with the faculty advisor. Students might share details about the course, the instructor, and the assignments (in course evaluations). They might also offer information about their experience with the internship supervisor and the organization. This information is useful to the faculty advisor who can use it to reshape an internship course or recommend (or not recommend) to students with similar interests.

Fortunately, technology can make the assessment process more efficient and less cumbersome. We have used Symplicity and many others use Handshake, but additional options are available. Regardless of brand, the technology allows for collaboration on the internship contract (by the intern, IS, and faculty advisor), standardized assessments at set points during the term, automated communication (such as reminders) about assessments, a single system tracking all of the information, and the option to analyze the internship data. In addition, the system is paperless and environmentally friendly.

Figure 3: 360-Degree Assessment Checklist



CONCLUSION

After two decades, 360-degree feedback in the workplace has been found to be valuable for employees and employers. While studies indicate that significant changes in behavior can occur as a result of well-implemented 360-degree assessments, others caution that such assessments can backfire if not implemented well (Edleson 2012). Internships are an ideal vehicle for providing more comprehensive and multi-sourced feedback because students are in internships to learn more about the positions and organizations where they are interning. Taking advantage of the opportunity to obtain varied and meaningful feedback from the internship site and the faculty advisor should enhance the overall learning experience.

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ENDNOTES

1. Figure 1 serves as a foundation on which we build a more comprehensive approach to assessment (depicted in figure 3). This schematic represents our original work, and we became aware of a similar figure in Lei and Yin (2019) after we developed it.
2. Refer to the supplemental resource, Rules for Interns, for a list of criteria (FLSA fact sheet updated 2018).
3. Elements of this chapter were presented at the American Political Science Association's Annual Meeting, August 30, 2014, Washington, DC. A year later, the coauthors were awarded the APSA Political Science Education Section's "Best Presentation Award in 2014" for this work. In 2016 parts of this research were published in the *Journal of Political Science Education* in the article, "The Forgotten Educator: Experiential Learning's Internship Supervisor." The authors were recognized for this article with the "2019 National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) Award of Excellence in Outstanding Experiential Education Research." With permission from Taylor & Francis, this chapter contains material borrowed from Sosland and Lowenthal (2016).
4. This quote comes from our 2009 pilot study.
5. American University, "Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET); Bank of Questionnaire Items," June 18, 2020, <https://www.american.edu/provost/oira/set/qbank.cfm>.
6. See supplemental materials for self-assessment worksheets, or Burnett and Evans (2020).
7. NACE offers sample assessment forms that include many career readiness skills. NACE Internship performance Assessments (midterm and final). See: <https://www.naceweb.org/uploadedfiles/files/2017/career-readiness-resources/nace-cr-resources-intern-evaluations.pdf>.
8. Eleven faculty advisors participated in the focus group on December 12, 2014. The participants had extensive experience in the internship realm, averaging over 10 years of experience each; several had more than 25 years of experience.
9. For sample internship contract, see Sosland and Lowenthal (2017) and see supplemental resources.
10. NACE, "Intern Performance Evaluation Template" (Courtesy of Career and Internship Center, University of Washington): <https://www.naceweb.org/uploadedfiles/files/2019/career-readiness-resources/nace-cr-resource-university-of-washington.pdf>.

