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Economics Newsletter

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ON-THE-JOB UNIVERSITY LEARNING

by

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The Department of Economics at South Dakota State University offers academic programs in the College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences and in the College of Arts and Science. In the College of Agriculture, students can major in Agricultural Business or Agricultural Economics. Within the Economics major in the College of Arts and Science, options are available in Commercial Economics or General Economics.

In Agricultural Economics and General Economics, mathematics, statistics, and quantitative economics are emphasized. Graduates of these programs most commonly enter agricultural or corporate research, government employment, or graduate study.

In Agricultural Business and Commercial Economics, finance, management, accounting, and business law are emphasized. Students completing these programs most often enter the fields of banking and finance, business management, or farming and ranching.

Communications skills, Computer Science, and a broad range of economic theory courses are included in all the department's programs.

University graduates from these programs are intended to be valuable employees. The expected value of graduates has traditionally been based on the formal academic courses that the students have taken. In recent years, however, less structured on-the-job

work experiences have become part of our students' educational programs. Because the "internship" activities are increasingly common and are viewed as very valuable by both students and other employees, this Newsletter issue is devoted to an explanation of the department's internship program.

Nature of student internships

Student intern employment can involve summer jobs, part time positions while students are in school, or alternating positions in which students interrupt their regular study programs with one or more semesters of full time work. The intern employment taken by students relates to the kinds of jobs which students expect after graduation.

A recent Title VIII federal grant is providing support for the development of improved internships and other cooperative education experiences among students and potential employers. The grant also facilitates increased contact between the Departmental Program Coordinator and the students' employers during periods of intern employment. Further, the Small Business Administration is providing support to teams of two or three students who act as consultants in problem solving situations for farms and non-farm businesses.

Benefits of student intern programs

The internship program helps students integrate on-the-job experience with the formal classroom learning that they have received. Interns write reports of their on-the-job experiences. They usually receive three hours of academic credit for each such experience. This is equivalent to the credit granted for most single university courses.

Participating in the student internship program enables students not only to earn academic credit, but also

to become more aware of the types of jobs that they might take up after graduation. Thus, the internship program enables students to explore fields of professional interest, test acquired knowledge, and improve their views of management functions. Sometimes, also, the academic motivation of students increases as a result of their participating in internship programs.

The internship program can also provide employers useful exposure to future possible long term employees. Being able to observe student interns in part time or temporary positions usually can be expected to provide greater insight than traditional "30 minute" interviews, on the suitability of possible candidates for permanent positions. At the same time, students can be more confident in anticipating how fully they might be suited to permanent positions similar to those followed during their internships.

Arrangements for student internships

Students are responsible for finding their intern employment. Sometimes the initiative is entirely their own. In other instances, employers inform the Economics Department concerning their possible internship needs or use the University Placement Service to seek out possible student interns.

Employers who are interested in capable, qualified temporary or part time help or who wish to employ a prospective permanent employee for a protracted trial period are encouraged to contact the Internship Coordinator, Department of Economics, or the SDSU Placement Service.

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