

Using Canvas to Managing Extension Summer Internships

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Introduction and Literature Review

At Oregon State University (OSU), the Division of Extension and Engagement has partnered with the Department of Agricultural Education and Agricultural Sciences (AEAS) to establish an inaugural student Extension internship program. Many agricultural sciences, and related degrees, require students to participate in at least one internship for graduation credit, and Extension internships are common in many states. Internships are an experiential learning experience that allows students to apply practical and academic skills to a professional, real-world setting (Position Statements: U.S. Internships, 2018; Wilken et al., 2008). In an internship, students gain real-world experience, professionalism, and tangible work skills for their future (Rogers et al., 2001; Wilken et al., 2008). In preparing the OSU internship, the coordinators wanted to provide an experience unique to students from all majors and backgrounds, which would be mutually beneficial for employers and students and allow them to grow in personal development, skill development, and academic learning.

Many State Extension Service across the United States (U.S.) have internship programs that allow students to have 10-12-week experiences shadowing and learning from Extension Agents (Internships, 2020; Ohio State University Extension Internship Program, 2020; Tennessee Extension Internships, 2020; UF/IFAS Extension Internship Program, 2020). Within the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service (UK CES), the internship cohorts can be as large as 40 students with interns placed in offices across the entire state (Internships, 2020). In UK CES, students' interns are placed in their designated county after a round of interviews conducted by State Extension specialists; students select their top counties, and the State specialists contact the counties and plan for student placement.

During a summer Extension internship, the primary contact for questions is typically the county intern's supervising Agent, and the supervisor oversees any projects on which a student works. Some states required students to take the lead on at least one summer project, which provides an opportunity to learn about preparing Extension programs, contacting stakeholders, delivering an educational program, and evaluating that work (Internships, 2020). There are variations in the type of work students are able and allowed to do, depending on the internship supervisor's autonomy. Some universities also offer class credit for participating in the internship (Oregon State University, 2020), which may require some additional work, reports, and coordination with the student's college or academic unit.

While the summer internship's fundamental goal is for students to work towards professional development, the OSU coordinators also wanted to scaffold the internship experience and provide a central platform for the cohort to engage, discuss, and process their experiences together. The collaboration between OSU Extension Service and the OSU Department AEAS offered a partnership that included Extension expertise and educational delivery experience.

How it works

Oregon State University Extension Service and OSU Department of AEAS created a central online internship location through Canvas. Canvas is a learning management platform for remote and in-person educational delivery and management. The internship coordinators created a non-credit Canvas site to be a one-stop-location for required documents, training videos, submitting required works, and a designated platform to ask questions and learn from their

fellow interns. The Canvas page was designed by an agricultural education master's student familiar with designing online instruction through Canvas.

Student interns received a university ID and email address upon being hired, and their university credentials allow them to participate on the Canvas internship page. Once they are added to the non-credit course, interns can begin navigating the site. The Canvas page includes weekly modules that scaffold the student experience through their 10-week internship. Since there were various start dates among the cohort, the Canvas page is self-paced, and each week includes a short reading, a discussion board forum, and a task associated with the corresponding week of their internship. Each week, the discussion board forum allowed students to engage with one another about their successes, shortcomings, areas of confusion, and growth areas. Canvas was also the central location for announcements to the whole cohort. Last, the internship coordinators can give feedback each week to the cohort and further guide them to meet their summer learning objectives.

Using the Canvas page to coordinate the student learning experience allows internship coordinators to have all internship materials in one location and a uniform platform for providing feedback. While Canvas is not the learning management platform used by all universities, many universities have similar platforms that allow for an opportunity to design a single location for all internship items. It is recommended to use the platform that is already available and used by the university. In addition to using this approach for an Extension internship, a non-credit online learning platform can also be used for new Extension hires.

Results to date and future plans

Oregon State University is using Canvas for the inaugural cohort of students interns for the summer of 2020. The 2020 cohort is the first internship class making this the first time OSU has used Canvas to manage the Extension internship. Some students have completed their internships and reported that the Canvas site was helpful as it had all their learning materials in one spot. One student mentioned, "it was helpful to a check-list of items to complete, the orientation videos all in one location, and a location to submit materials," (J. Comments, personal communications, August 21, 2020). Although another student mentioned, "it was just another task among the many other tasks from the summer," (M. Justice, personal communication, August 20, 2020).

Each student will participate in an exit-interview and will have an opportunity to provide feedback about their experience with Canvas; we have only received feedback from half of the summer interns and hope to continue gathering data through the end of the summer.

Costs

Canvas, or other learning management platforms are available through all universities, therefore the platform is at no cost to the program. However, a cost consideration is the time spent to design the Canvas page as well as the FTE associated with managing the students work and check-in calls.

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