

Information Related to Student Internships and Capstone Project Agreements – For Faculty and Departments

In setting up capstone projects, coops, or internships, the supervising faculty and department need to be aware of several things and make a number of academic decisions.

1. The first is to define the academic outcomes expected from the interactions and their importance to the student's programs.
2. The next step is to provide academic alternatives. This means that in any situation, such as a capstone class, the class should provide alternatives to working on company projects where the students are obligated to transfer ownership of the intellectual property to the company.
3. The next is the conditions under which the unit allows companies to access classes or students. This is the main point of control that the unit exercises in protecting student interests and educational goals.

Why? Remember in most situations, students are not employees of the university nor does the university have any ownership or control over their intellectual property. In addition, the university is not a representative, agent or broker for the company. Thus any rights the participating companies want are based upon agreements directly between them and each student working on their project. While the unit may hand out the agreements – each student needs to be free to make a choice regarding project participation or not. Companies will need to provide a simple agreement for students, units decide if these are consistent with their conditions of access, and then students will need to decide whether or not to participate in a given project under the term the company offers.

4. In setting up internships, the situation is a bit different. The students are going to work at a company. There you should expect that the students would need to sign what is a form of employment agreement. Problems arise when the internships overlap with thesis or dissertation work. Then one needs to carve out explicitly and in advance, a scope of work at the company so that it doesn't overlap with the graduate program. If there is an expectation that the internship contributes to the thesis or dissertation work, then the student needs the ability to publish the necessary elements of the work in the thesis or dissertation and an appropriate access to data – remember the internship work may be considered confidential and proprietary to the company.