

Curriculum Assessment Report

Design Program | Fall 2024

To meet the assessment expectations for Fall 2024, the Design Program performed an “indirect assessment” in the form of a “reflection report” focused on our program’s internship requirements. After assessing all of our PLOs in previous years, full-time design faculty members wanted to explore more specifically how we might improve upon our internship curriculum. This was top of mind given the discussions around career-readiness and internships at the CAS / USFFA summits.

Since a curriculum update was performed in 2018, all Design majors in our program are now required to take *ART 450 Design Internship*, a 2-unit capstone course offered every Spring for Seniors. In this class students are required to complete 50-60 hrs of work at an internship that they are responsible for finding. Most of the course work comes from the student’s field work but 2-3 in-person class meetings plus weekly asynchronous homework assignments supplement the students field work. In order to prepare for finding and securing an internship, students first take the prerequisite capstone course *ART 480 Professional Practices in Design*. This 2-unit course runs every Fall semester where students learn skills for entering the job market like preparing a portfolio and resume.

Reflections:

Initially faculty members discussed their experiences teaching the internship course. A recurring issue brought up was the challenge of placing ALL seniors in an internship during a single Spring semester. In our internship class model, the heavy responsibility of internship placement often falls on only one or two class instructors. Each year, a few students are unable to secure an internship in time, which places additional pressure on the lone class instructor. In these cases, the instructor often helps students piece together internship hours through unpaid or volunteer work. (It should be noted that, in at least one instance a student was allowed to receive an incomplete grade so that she could locate an internship at her home base in China during the post-graduation summer months.) Faculty also noted the variability in the quality of internship experiences and the level of professional development. Additionally, it came up that many students inquire about receiving credit for summer internships instead. Furthermore, it was observed that the weekly asynchronous assignments felt burdensome, with students tending to prioritize their fieldwork over the coursework.

Considerations:

In efforts to explore beyond just faculty reflections, we created an “[Exit Survey for the Internship Class](#).” With the form we want to gather more data on the student experience—about a student's individual internship experience, and about internships in general at USF within the Design Program.

Next Faculty members spent time researching internship models at other institutions. We tried to identify internship criteria within Design Programs from other Jesuit and liberal arts institutions around the country as well as from our local competitor programs at California College of the Arts (CCA) and San Francisco State. We even looked into schools that boast co-op programs—a structure quite different from ours.

From our research, we found that there are many institutions that appear to offer design internship courses that in most ways match what we are doing, without discernible differences. These include Parsons/the New School, San Francisco State University, San Jose State University, the University of Kansas, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Oregon. However, for example, Design students at UC Davis are expected to obtain internships, though not as part of a class that receives credit hours. This has raised questions for us regarding the ways in which the Davis internship experience is administered by faculty, if it is.

The only Jesuit institutions that offer some form of design or communication arts degree are Creighton University in Omaha, Loyola University New Orleans, and Xavier University Cincinnati. Neither Creighton nor Loyola offer any kind of internship course. Xavier's course of Design study is 52 credits, and their internship course, *ARTS 493*, is shared by all students within the collective Studio Arts disciplines.

Students at Cal Poly Pomona receive one unit of credit for each 50 hours of design internship time, and may repeat that experience up to four times, for four credits. Students must turn in project work that they completed during the internship during the 15th week of classes each semester. All internship sponsors must be registered with the university's Center for Community Engagement.

Students at Colby-Sawyer College take both a sophomore-level design internship and a senior-level design internship. Both courses are graded pass/fail.

Similar to what we do, at Auburn University students first enroll in a two-hour course titled "Graphic Design Internship Practicum" that guides them through the process of building a portfolio, designing a resumé, writing a cover letter, and understanding job search tactics. Students then enroll in a four-credit course that is devoted specifically to the internship experience.

Design students University of Washington are allowed to take their internships during the summer months. Each student must prepare an internship proposal which they must submit to the Design faculty before June 1. This schedule allows the students to enroll in full-time internships that last the course of the summer, and also allows the students to travel. Each student must then give a public presentation of their internship experience as part of a Pecha Kucha event, in addition to writing an internship report.

CCA's Graphic Design internship program asks their students to have successfully completed all required Level 3 design courses (the junior level) to enroll. Students who intern before they

complete their required Level 3 courses may not use the experience for credit. After securing an intern position at an approved internship site, students must log a minimum of 150 hours at the site. The internship counts for two credits and is generally completed during the summer between junior and senior year. Compensation is a mandatory requirement of their internship program.

Finally we looked at co-op programs within Drexel University's Graphic Design Program and within University of Cincinnati's Communication Design Program. In both of these programs students alternate between full academic semesters and full-time work semesters. This means about 2-3 semesters, at least, are spent away from campus doing internship fieldwork. In order to facilitate this schedule students begin their internship rotations their sophomore year and are heavily supported by a "career center" that already has available internships established. A fifth year is often needed at these programs in order for students to complete their degree. Though we assume gaining so much work experience would be enticing for students, this model felt like the least viable option for our program at USF.

Next Steps

Based on our above efforts and findings we would like to figure out how we might implement an optional summer internship course as an addition to our current internship requirements. We also wondered if internship course offerings could be graded pass/fail allowing us to eliminate the supplemental work. Lastly, we questioned if internships could be more centrally managed across our department or college as seen at other institutions.

In the short term, for this next semester, Spring 2025, we will begin to collect data via our new survey. We will also try to cut down on the amount of weekly assignments in our internship course. And finally we would like to begin talking with the dean's office about some of the changes we would like to explore.