A Platform for Sharing Internship Experiences

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Abstract: Education in disciplines related to library and information science (LIS) requires providing students with opportunities for experiential as well as theoretical learning. The student internship opportunity is characterized as an authentic learning experience offering opportunities to engage in problem-solving by requiring participants to obtain knowledge of the specific context of their work activities and task challenges. To achieve effective experiential learning, a platform for fostering interactions between interns, LIS faculty and supervisors at job sites is needed. To support this, the current study developed and implemented an online reflective journal system to meet the purposes of sharing experiences among students, supervisors, and university faculty. This paper introduces the development and design of the online reflective journal system and addresses the theoretical foundations underlying the use of reflective process as among interns.

Keywords: internship, experiential learning, reflective learning, online reflective journal, Drupal, Content Management System

Internship for experiential learning

Encouraging students involved in practical work settings has potential impact on students' learning from real world experiences. Education in the disciplines of library and information science requires providing students with opportunities for experiential as well as theoretical learning (Franks & Oliver, 2012). Students' internship opportunity is characterized as an authentic learning experience offering opportunities to engage in problem-solving by requiring participants to obtain knowledge of the specific context of their work activities and task challenges (Anderson et al, 2012). The purpose of internship is to allow the intern to work collaboratively through the internship period with members of work sites, who supervise the hands-on work of particular tasks (Anderson et al, 2012).

Education in library and information science has long emphasized experiential learning from various practices and services, and practical work experience serves a means to prepare LIS students for their professional development (Becker, 2000; Bird, Chu & Oguz, 2011). In recent years, there has been a rapidly increasing demand for LIS professionals to explore new technologies to meet the needs of businesses and government agencies (Franks & Oliver, 2012). This relatively new and pressing need has created a rising demand for various types of LIS professional education and training to cope with intensive use of the latest technological tools and methods. Effective internship in LIS should provide "apprenticeship-based" opportunities for students to apply theoretical and conceptual knowledge gained in the classroom to actual settings (Malik & Ameen, 2010).

Diverse internship opportunities can be provided by LIS professionals. These opportunities link not only the various types of knowledge taught in courses, but also a broad array of experiences in internship from various organizations (Anderson et al., 2012). Compared to other experiential learning approaches for the students' professional development, internships provide a more comprehensive experience. In their internship, students immerse themselves into the daily routines of an organization, where they can experience the

professional world, observe a variety of role models, and put the theory and academic training into practice (Bird, Chu, & Oguz, 2011). Students can be motivated to acquire the habits of critical thinking and the ability to identify the most critical issues within a real-life situation during their internship opportunity. Employers in library and information science (LIS) often emphasize knowledge and skills acquired through internship (Ramnarine-Rieks, et al, 2011). Thus the assessment of students' achievement and learning reflections from their internship should also be given high priority for judging its success.

Use of online journal for reflective learning

In helping students learning in various subject areas, journal writing has been suggested as an intentional reflective design strategy that can be used to augment the traditional learning environment (Sommers, 2011). To provide an "apprenticeship-based" internship opportunity, effective communication is essential among interns, organizations, and faculty in the university. With the advancement of modern learning and communication online tools available, LIS education has integrated various technological applications into teaching settings to enhance students' competencies in the competitive job market (Cherry, Duff & Freund, 2011). The use of online tools for internship offers LIS educators an efficient approach for integrating interdisciplinary knowledge and working collaboratively, and for assessing students' learning outcomes pertinent to their professional development (Bird, Chu & Ogusz, 2011). Self-evaluation, in-depth reflections, and direct communication with members in work sites could be embedded in the online reflective journal to encourage students' knowledge construction.

In higher education, reflection has been increasingly recognized as important component in professional development. The process of reflection highlights the importance of time, context, and personal experience as key factors in the way these reflective modes might be used to provide information. This is because reflections take place in the present and look back over what has been done, thereby evaluating one's own habits and patterns of behavior (Hume, 2012; Martínez, 2012). Integrated into education and training, this approach has become an important measure for assessing student achievement and progress (Hallam, Harper & McAallister, 2012). Students can generate multiple gains along by documenting reflective and communicative processes, including mutual understandings, changes of thought, innovative ideas and motivations from internship activities.

Many studies have shown that students with internship experience are more likely to have a better grasp of concepts taught in classroom (Ramnarine-Rieks, et al, 2011). However, the process of learning cannot be assessed during the internship period with traditional approaches. The Internet, however, has expanded access to educational resources and interactions beyond the physical limitations of communication. Database systems can store vast amounts of interactions and information while keeping it readily accessible, thereby enhancing accountability of the learning process (Lammintakanen et al., 2002; Ruiz et al., 2009). These systems offer the opportunity to integrate meaningful work experience with learning and reflections that can enrich students' experiences and responsibility. Bridging theory and practice by connecting courses and works, students are provided with meaningful and contextual learning opportunities in their professional development (Malik & Ameen, 2010; Strage, 2000; Schweinle, Turner, & Meyer, 2009).

Development and implementation of online reflective journal system

There have been significant changes in the field of LIS practice, including increasingly multidisciplinary and complex information environments, together with diverse professional demands. LIS faculty require adequate information for judging whether the internship program is working as planned or how well it is serving organizational objectives (Hyman & Wedgeworth, 1991). A successful internship program should offer opportunities to understand and communicate for assessing requirements from LIS practitioner community, personal characteristics of students, and strategies for teaching and learning in LIS (Ramnarine-Rieks, et al, 2011). To assess the effectiveness of an internship program, feedback from various perspectives pertinent to students' learning through their working experiences are essential, including the roles of interns, faculty and work site supervisors (Dodge and Mckeough, 2003).

For students' professional preparation, internships are an essential part of the curriculum in the Department of Library & Information Science at Fu Jen Catholic University. To offer students richer internship experiences, an online reflective journal system was developed to provide interconnections and knowledge sharing among individual interns, work site supervisors, and faculty members in the LIS department (Figure 1).

Figure 1. LIS Online Internship Journal System

Instruments for operating the online journal system are summarized in Table 1.   The online reflective journal system was developed by Drupal (http://drupal.org/), an open Content Management System (CMS) that is written in PHP to allow web developers to create, edit, manage, and publish webpages.   These range from personal blogs to enterprises or even government websites, including the White House webpage (http://www.whitehouse.gov/).   Like other CMSs, which are frequently used for storing, controlling, versioning, and publishing industry-specific documentation, Drupal contributes more than 17,000 modules, themes, and pre-defined configurations.   These allow users to select or assemble contents of various functionalities and features (Wikipedia, n.d.).   In the "LIS Online Internship Journal System", a total of 63 modules were used and revised.   In addition to the core module, other modules, such as user account registration and maintenance, menu management, RSS feeds, and page layout customization are also utilized.

Table 1. Instruments for developing and operating of the online journal system

Items	Development tools
Operational system	Ubuntu Desktop 12.04 LTS
CMS Platform	Drupal 7.14
Server	Apache 2.2.22
Programming Language	PHP5.3.10
Database	MySQL 5.5.24
Browser	Internet Explorer、Firefox、Chrome
Module	63 (including core module and other modules)

In designing the intern journal system, different access levels were given, based on the requirements of different identities, including interns, supervisors at work sites, and faulty at LIS (teachers and teaching assistants).   Users of the online internship journal system are categorized into the group of students, supervisors, faculty, and administrators. Faculty has access to view and write feedback to respond to interns' journals, review comments from supervisors, and provide access control to work site supervisors. These supervisors have access to comments on their own interns' journals.   Interns can reflect on their working experiences, such

as descriptions about daily work, self-evaluation, and inspirations.   Feedback can also be given from different perspectives pertinent to students' learning experiences (Figure 2).
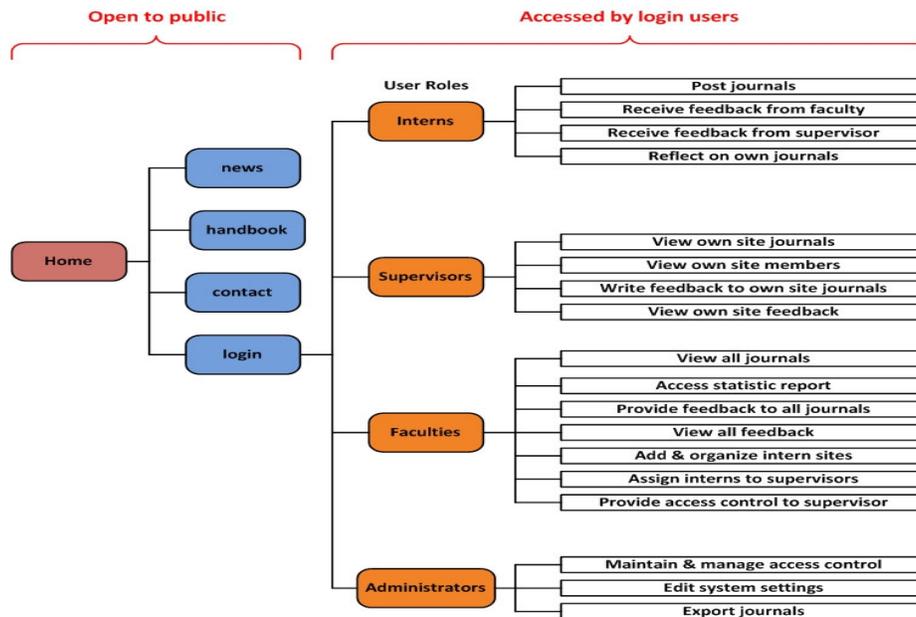

Figure 2. Function structure and access control of the system

Sharing intern experiences

During the implementation stage, students used the systems to record and reflect upon their internship experiences along with their intern period, and the frequency of using the system was recorded (Figure 3). Students' journals were accessed by their work site supervisors and LIS faculty members and responses were made accordingly.   Based on the content of students' reactions, the use of this online reflective journal provided students with an opportunity to review the tasks accomplished during the internship period, and to evaluate their skills needed in future job market.
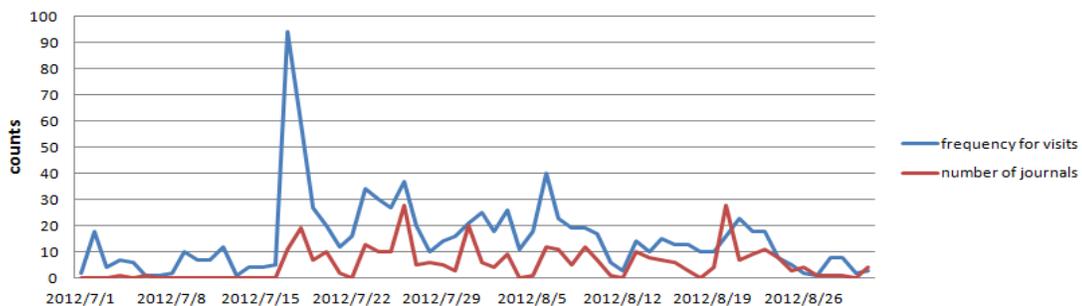

Figure 3. Frequency count for the use of online reflective journal for LIS

From the experience of sharing and self-reviewing, students were also given with opportunities to reflect on problems encountered in specific service sites.   For example, some responses are listed:

"On my first day of the internship, I was nervous.   Operation of the ALEPH library system was quite different from what we used to do in KOHA."
"Most of the staff in the company can speak fluent English.   To be qualified for employment, English

proficiency is very important."

"The service quality among volunteer workers varied.   Some of volunteers did not interact patiently with our clients."

"Some of the intern tasks were very routine, but important to the library."

"In the beginning, I was not familiar with system interface.   But I gradually developed skills in using it."

Conclusions

Development of this online reflective journal system provided the opportunity for between interns, work site supervisors, and faculty.   The online reflective journal allowed faculty to understand how interns work collaboratively with members in work sites.   Work site supervisors were able to understand students' achievements and problems encountered during their internship.   Students were also provided with opportunities to reflect to their experiences in working with their teams and learning from hands-on work participation in particular tasks.   It is hoped that the future implementation of this and other online reflective journal systems will support the further integration of theoretical knowledge and practical work among interns, work site supervisors, and LIS faculty.

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