Internship Policy Motion and Rationale

Dear Senators,

Now that we have amended the internship policy, students in courses required for graduation do not have to sign a waiver. Students in courses that are not required DO have to sign waivers. Currently, I understand that we are using a definition of “required” that essentially says, if the course is part of the required curriculum of a department or program, and all students in that program must take it to graduate, then students do not have to sign waivers. They DO have to sign waivers for so-called non-required courses, as defined above.

I object to this distinction. Take my own dept. We offer internships as an elective. Hence, they are not considered required under current practice. But let me tell you a story. Last fall, I advised a student who I will can Javier. Javier is an anthro major with an interest in the arts. When we met, he had some prior, brief experience working for an arts organization. He also aspires to a career involving youth and the arts. After listening to, and talking to Javier, I concluded that an internship with a local arts organization was important to his education – an education for which he, like so many of our students, is sacrificing much to achieve. I contacted some folks and was able to arrange an arts internship for him in Spring 2020, during which he gained precious experience with the grant planning and writing process at a local organization. Currently, Javier’s internship is not considered, “required.” BUT this is an invidious distinction. Javier took his internship after the time honored process of seeing an academic advisor, during which we both talked AND listened and decided on a course of action. This course is one that I believe is in Javier’s absolute best interest given his experience and aspirations. I recommended this course on the basis of over 20 years working here, with students like Javier, trying to facilitate the best possible education for our students. HOW is Javier’s internship “not required”? The answer is, it IS required – given my judgment and his unique situation. It IS required for him to get the absolute MOST out of an education that is costly to him in time and money, as well as other personal sacrifices. And it would be wrong for me as an educator to frame his internship, the one I arranged for him, in any other way than, required.

Colleagues, I ask that we all pause for a minute and get in touch with the fact that we are scholars and educators first. Please set aside whatever bureaucratic expediency is currently connected to the word “required,” and think about what we do as educators, because before anything else, that is what we are and that is why we have shared governance in the first place. So we faculty, AS faculty, must make it clear to the entire university WHAT we do and HOW we do it and HOW we can do it effectively and ethically.

I propose the motion: To add the following to the internship policy as a footnote following the word “program” just added.  **“Student’s academic program” will be defined within this policy as “the individualized combination of courses for credit students take to earn their degrees, including GE, major, minor, as well as electives” or as “individualized course of study.”**

In other words, departmentally-approved internship and service-learning courses that can be and are taken to meet degree requirements should not be considered outside of students’ academic programs at Fresno State.

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