Reviewing GET IE: An Open Co-op Program

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We discuss key aspects of an open co-op program called the Global Enterprise Technology Immersion Experience (GET IE). The program creates a global enterprise focus for technology-oriented academic majors, integrated with an eight-month paid internship to provide a context in which students are stimulated to utilize their classroom experience. The program, in effect, creates a domain specific next generation ABET-compliant co-op program that complements typical computer science curricula with a skill-set that is required for creating very large, global enterprise applications for technically and socially diverse organizations. The program’s unique pedagogical innovation is to simultaneously provide the students 12-18 credits of academic course work that is integrated within a students extended internship and provides relevant problems in global enterprise technology. The program is also unique because it is “open” in the sense that other institutions, students and companies can participate in GET IE.

We focus our discussion on two keys aspects of the program. First, we discuss how GET IE can work for students from other Universities – ranging from how courses “count” for computer science / engineering majors to how we coordinate interviews across a variety of locations during the application process. Second, we review the problem-based learning that occurs at the beginning of the residency, just prior to the start of their internship. During this week-long residency that kicks off the program, students, typically in groups of 4, are assigned a problem that involves working with a client (who works for a Future-500 company) to solve a specific request. The problem encourages the students not only to work on a proposed technology solution, but also forces them to apply financial analysis (the business case of the solution) and understand organizational dynamics of how the solution might impact work teams within the organization. Students also gain the opportunity to practice their communication skills (interacting with the client, management presentations and an “elevator pitch” of their proposed solution).

Based on our experience, by combining a problem-based approach with a simulation of a client engagement, student interest remains at a very high level throughout the week, even though students were working 12+ hour days on this problem. In fact, students seem to enjoy the focused problem solving environment and the “learning by doing” atmosphere. We also note that student motivation increased significantly due to the fact that students knew they would be presenting the results of their efforts to industry professionals. This observation parallels the rest of the program – where experiential learning, combined with foundational coursework provides a unique learning opportunity for students.

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