Exploring Career Alternatives

Bernadette Marczely

The internship program at Ridgefield (Connecticut) High School helps students explore career alternatives through first-hand experience.

Students enrolled in the program choose four different career interest areas. They spend four weeks on each career area, working under the supervision of a resource person at a job site. They observe or work a minimum of eight hours a week. Depending on the activity involved, students may spend two hours each day for four days or four hours a day for two days on the job. Schedules and individual arrangements are flexible to ensure maximum exposure to the career area. If a chosen field has several different aspects, the school's career coordinator may vary the four-week site assignment to give the student experience at various sites.

At least one day of the school week, students report back to the career education coordinator to discuss site projects, evaluate the experience to date, and plan the next week's projects. The goal is to have students explore in the greatest depth possible all phases of several career choices, including economic and social demands, and preparation and entry level requirements.

Student interns receive no pay for their work at the career site. They do, however, receive a grade for completing assigned projects. These projects, designed by the career coordinator, help students analyze the exigencies of employment in a chosen field. Typical projects include:

- **Site Interviews:** Students interview people who work at the career site, asking about preparation for a given position, entry to the field, and future prospects.
- **Personal Evaluations:** Students write an evaluation of direct participation in site activities.

The student's choices of career interest areas determine job sites, project assignments, and time allotments. No judgment is passed on a student's choices or ability to rise to the occasion. The coordinator serves as a facilitator and career counselor, helping the student evaluate each career. Students are urged to be honest with themselves in assessing any career choice, and in comparing that choice with their three alternatives.

The internship program, in its third year of operation at Ridgefield High School, offers a vital opportunity to students who are sure of their career choice and to those who are undecided. It makes all students conscious of career realities and alternatives in a way that no classroom lecture can. More important, it gives them the chance to explore, evaluate, and, if they choose, change their minds before the stakes are too high.

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