

**AN INTEGRATIVE STUDY
OF INTERNSHIPS & CAREER SERVICES**

**Addressing the Market to
Meet Student Needs for
Employment Preparedness**

Prepared for

**University of Michigan-Dearborn
School of Management Internship Office**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report interprets survey data, along with primary and secondary research, to determine how internships (and co-ops) are best used to maximize student engagement and improve the quality of experiential learning.

Originally, this study began as an undertaking to tabulate qualitative data from an informal survey of college-level career services and internship offices. As the work progressed, certain patterns emerged – and when coupled with further analysis, we started to see a methodology for implementing a successful experiential learning program. Herein, we evaluate the perspectives of students, employers, and schools and make recommendations to insure a meaningful, productive experience.

Survey results were collected from 64 institutions (51 providing a minimum four-year degree). The following key components summarize an ideal model for the experience:

- Early and frequent communication about services offered and steps to take
- Orientation and professional skills development seminars prior to experience
- A paid work experience, with adequate challenge, relevant to the chosen major
- Full academic credit offered upon completion of appropriate coursework content
- Increased accessibility to counselors, professors, and employers

These suggestions mandate an organizational timeline and structure; that is, the career services or internship office must establish the ideal path for students to follow. It is presumed to be a fundamental goal of all programs to provide a personal-growth opportunity for every student to utilize in their employment search. Accordingly, the institution's goals should be to develop and manage the experience, the employer's goals should be to recruit and become involved early in the academic careers of students, and the students must be prepared for – and thoroughly engaged in – their role as intern.

Observations from other programs and studies are introduced to help better understand the responsibility, and sometimes the attitudes, of the various stakeholders. Experiential learning programs are requested by both students and employers; schools are in an enviable position to bridge the gap and build long-term relationships with prospective employers. In fact, increasing student and employer participation is in the interest of the entire community. Highly sought-after programs will increase enrollment and further develop contributions to society-at-large.

Also, we recognize that the ideas and discussion presented here reflect on many academic functions beyond the internship office. From the eyes of the employer, we see the necessity of building interpersonal and communication skills. Students can also benefit from early orientation into the business world (or area of study) and start formulating their plans for success.

Lastly, we pay close attention to the growing function of technology in the administration of experiential learning programs and how it can best promote positive outcomes.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study is to better understand the competitive environment faced by students, their respective institutions, and employers and make recommendations to best meet these stakeholder needs.

Specifically, this report analyzes various inputs to present a comparative analysis of college career service programs. This is enhanced by assessing student and employer needs and trends toward technology based systems. Herein, we hope to answer the following question:

What makes for the most meaningful and productive experiential learning experience?

RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process included compiling qualitative data from an Internship Office survey¹ and supplementing that with further phone and internet investigation.

Usable survey data was received from 50 respondents, including local, peer, and aspirant schools. Thirteen responses were from community colleges or vocational schools; it was originally thought this data would skew any comparison, but the results were indeed useful and applicable to this report. Further, 14 regional four-year universities were added to provide competitive analysis. These were selected from the schools the University of Michigan-Dearborn (UMD) often compares its curriculum against.

For purposes of this study, the focus was on undergraduate education. However, many of the key findings and recommendations can easily translate to graduate level experiences, too. Several questions were asked of these 64 colleges and universities including:

- Is experiential learning required for any degree?
- Is experiential learning required for a business-related degree?
- Is full, partial, or zero academic credit given for internships?
- Are students paid during their work experience?
- Is tuition levied for experiential credit?
- What is the level of support, e.g., high-touch interaction vs. high-technology administration?

Also, student population figures and relevant career service program information was collected in the course of research. This was complemented with the iLabs findings at UMD and further exploration into other university programs. In the instances where a definitive answer could not be obtained, that school was excluded from the column results.

¹ Survey taken during the Fall 2007 semester.

Lastly, we found many schools interchanged the terms “co-op” and internship. Some schools consider co-ops a paid experience and internships not, whereas others make the distinction that a co-op is generally more technical and/or longer in duration. In compiling this report both terms were used, but adjusted to represent the business school within the college when available.

THE SURVEY SAYS...

Here we present summary findings from the tabulated survey of 64 institutions. As indicated above, 51 provide (at a minimum) four-year degrees and 13 are community or vocational colleges focusing on two-year educational programs. First we see median student enrollments, followed by discussion of the survey questions.

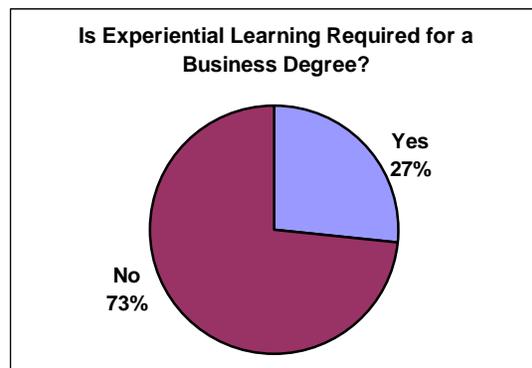
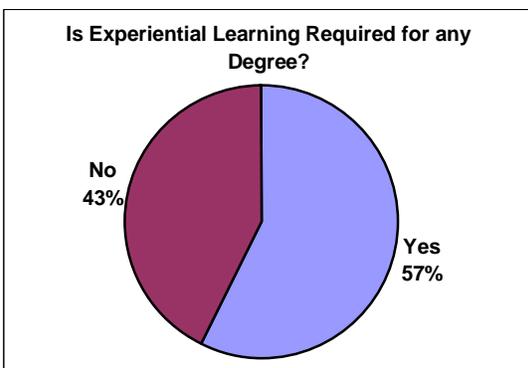
- Average undergraduate student population:² 16,997
- Average undergraduate business school enrollment:³ 2,817

Is experiential learning required for any degree?

Is experiential learning required for a business-related degree?

In these questions, we wanted to assess the overall penetration of the internship experience. Many schools report a required work experience – 57% of respondents agreed. Often, internships are used in conjunction with political science, journalism, and vocational majors.

However, this requirement is less pervasive in the business school arena. As we see, it is only required in 27% of business curriculums. Specifically, most schools that required an internship only did so for a few specific degrees. Most common business majors requiring an internship were International Business⁴ and Accounting. Often, significantly more business students actually participate in an internship program than is reported here.



² Used full-time equivalency data if available; otherwise summed full-time and part-time enrollment.

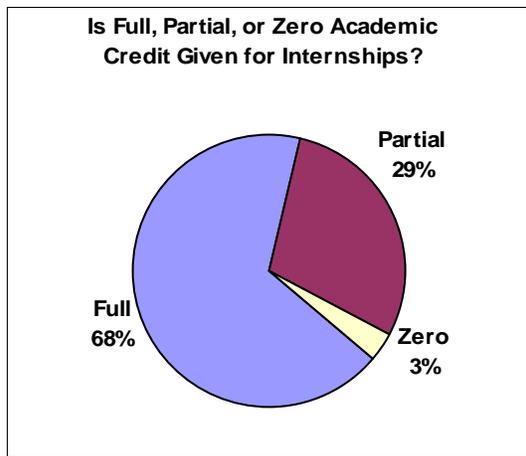
³ This includes those students matriculated into a BBA or similar program, typically junior/senior level.

⁴ Some universities replaced this requirement with an optional study-abroad component.

Is full, partial, or zero academic credit given for internships?

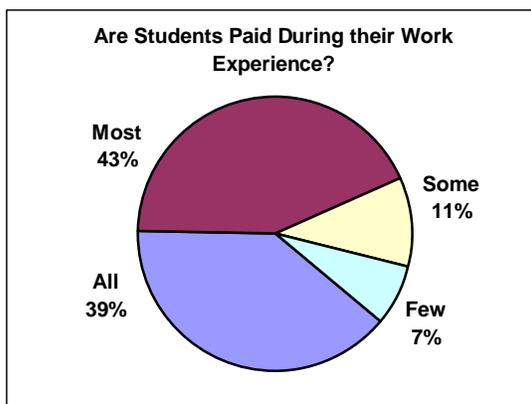
This question evaluates the level of academic credit granted for the experiential learning. We discuss later the merit of degree-related credit (including typical program oversight) versus additive credit later.

Most schools give full credit for an internship; that is, they receive an average of 3 credits per work experience. This credit is usually accompanied by some coursework, progress updates, and a final presentation. Schools reporting zero-credit often claimed credit would doubly reward students with pay and academic credit. Partial credit respondents fell in-between: many reported a program with optional credit, or awarded credit at a rate less than full-time. On average, schools granted one hour of credit for every 50-75 hours of experiential learning.



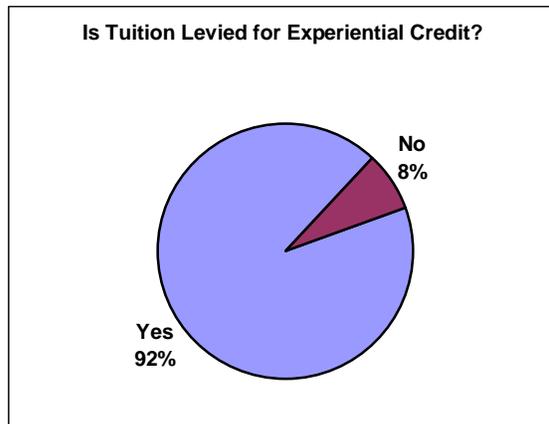
Are students paid during their work experience?

As mentioned above, some schools (especially those with religious affiliations) felt internships should be a non-paid experience. Business schools, on the other hand, recommended or arranged paid internships. Of those surveyed, 82% of internships were most likely paid positions.



Is tuition levied for experiential credit?

In nearly all for-credit internships, tuition is charged for the corresponding credit. This is generally regarded as a recoupment of the cost of administrative and educational oversight. A few schools offered 3 academic credits at no charge. A couple of community colleges reduced the tuition rates by approximately 50% for internship credit granted. Additionally, a handful of schools reported charging a nominal fee with the internship application or to attend required seminars.



What is the level of support, e.g., high-touch interaction vs. high-technology administration?

Our last – and perhaps most important – question with regard to the future of internship administration explores the level of student/administrator interaction during the experience. This was a difficult question that required quantifying qualitative data. For our purposes, we created five categories of interaction to tabulate the research:

High-Touch – These programs demonstrate a high level of administrative or professor support. They are well-structured with coursework components, required orientation seminars, and a high-level of personal interaction.

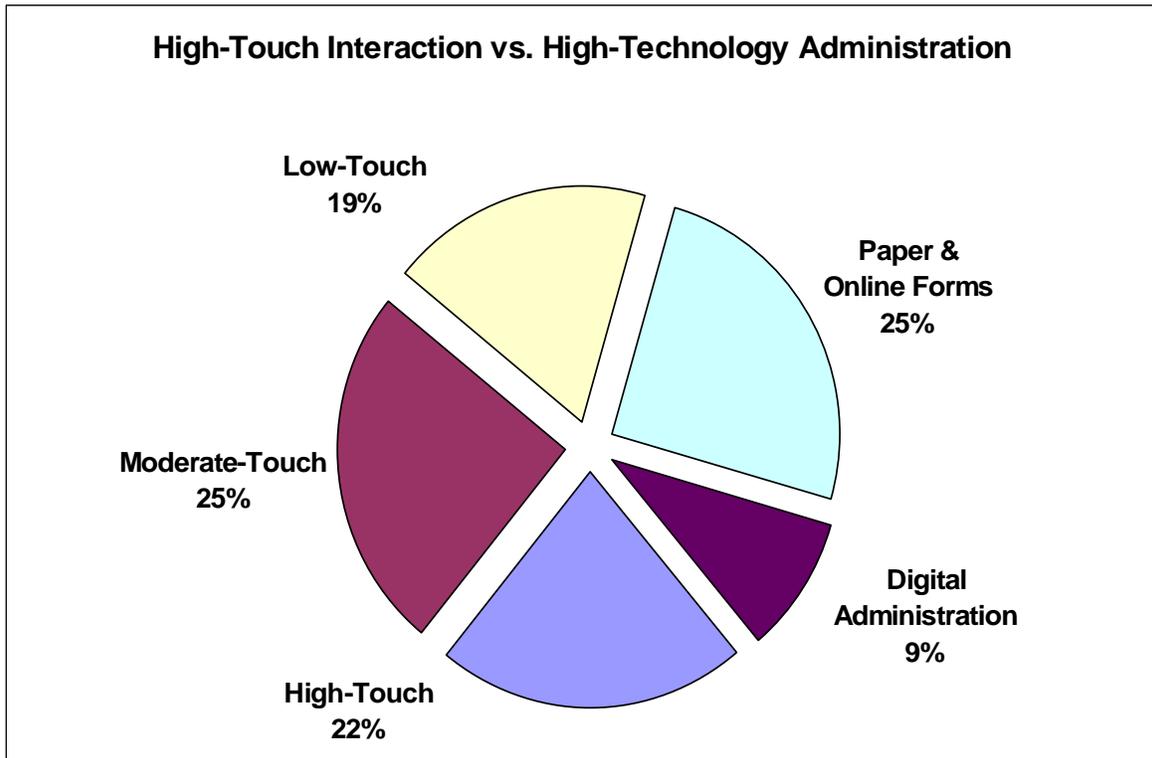
Moderate-Touch – These programs are most similar to the High-Touch, but do not maintain the same rigorous attention to the students, or require less participation.

Low-Touch – These programs are also similar to those above, but have very minimal requirements. There is often no orientation or help in finding an internship, and little academic work is required.

Paper/Online Forms – These programs rely solely on the student to file administrative paperwork (either online or in-person) to record the internship. It is the student's responsibility to find the experience and an advisor if needed.

Digital Administration – These programs may have elements of all the above, but they are administered and managed from an online access point. Our data suggests that colleges implementing this strategy offer minimal support through career services (especially relating to orientation or placement). Instead, the technology is relied upon to manage large numbers of internships and assure proper credit – even if there is no assessment or direction of the experience.

From those surveyed, we note that 47% are engaged heavily with the student for a successful internship. In fact, there appears to be a growing trend toward increasing the academic obligation and, accordingly, the necessary administrative support. While we did not probe deeply into specific programs, we provide discussion of the implications of digital administration shortly. Additional research is recommended to gauge the long-term success of digital program management.



Other Key Information – Credit

- On average, a maximum of 6 credits are eligible toward degree program; the range was found to be from 0 to 20 credits, with business schools typically at 3 or 6 credits
- Five respondents indicate requiring two or more terms of internship to gain credit
- Almost all reported a notation is made on transcript/diploma for the experience

- Few require a “career education” class to be taken before or during internship
- Almost 70% of respondents require coursework for satisfactory completion
 - Most include: a plan or learning contract, progress reports, and final paper/presentation submitted to a professor for academic review

Other Key Information – Grading

- Majority of respondents state internships are graded on a “pass/fail” basis
 - Common reasoning is to not include experiential learning in the GPA
- Majority report a minimum GPA to participate, 2.5 being the mode, 2.0-3.0 the range
- Many schools base credit on commitment; require working standard number of hours to complete 1-3 credits per semester – also reflected in number of concurrent courses allowed

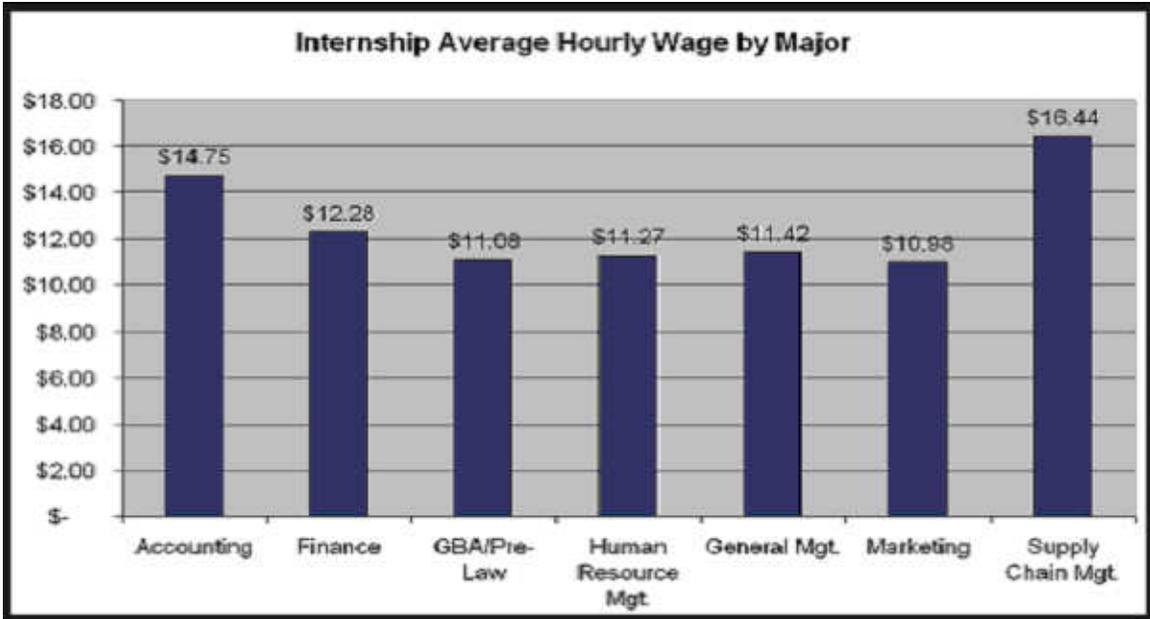
Other Key Information – Structure

- Most four-year colleges reserve internships for junior and senior level students
- Variations reported for summer-term supervision; some colleges do not offer administrative support or paid internships during the summer
- Most limit the amount of classes taken concurrent with an internship (2 average)
- Approximately 50% of respondents do not help with finding the internship, but instead direct the student to various external websites
- Near equal representation of alternating, parallel, and concurrent structuring⁵
- Few dedicated faculty administrators; many students are required to find a professor to oversee their academic credit – some are registered as independent study
- Often not centralized within career services, but a division of the academic unit
- Some report moving to an online orientation program for experiential learning
- Generally more participation at larger or non-commuter campuses

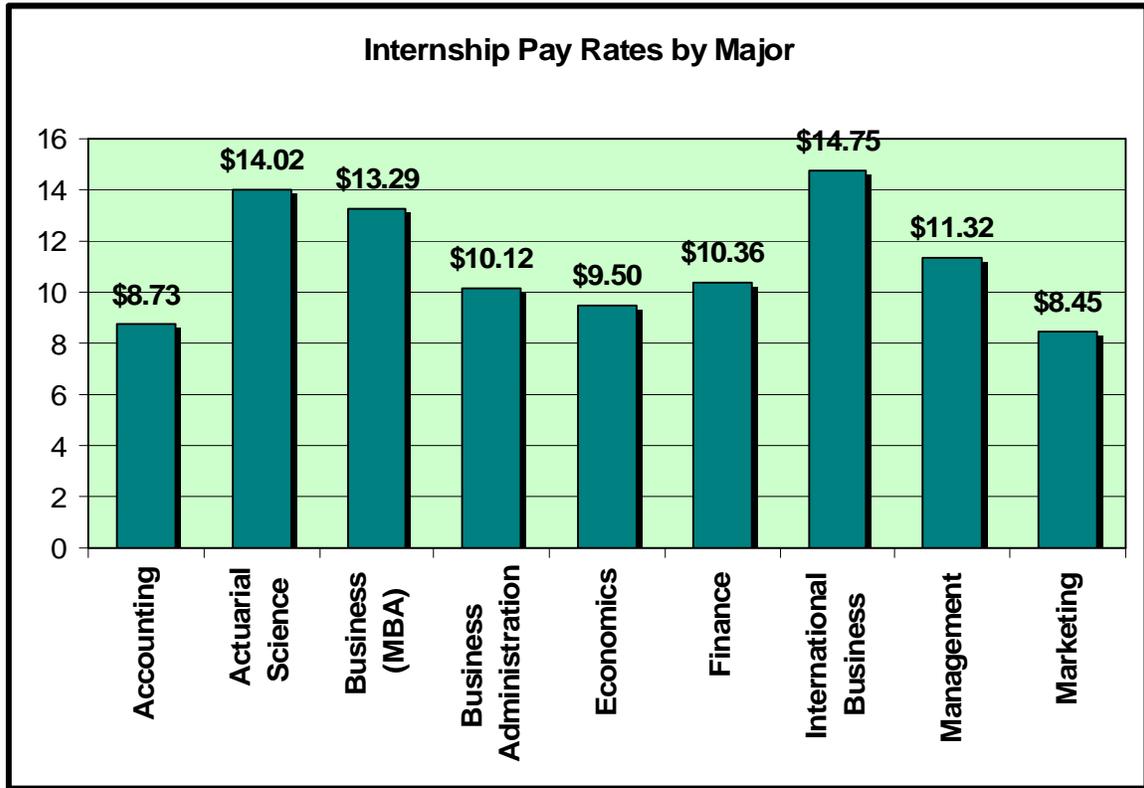
Other Key Information – Dollars & Sense

- Majority of internships are paid – average \$8-15 per hour; see tables below for a breakdown in average intern wages by major at Michigan State University Broad College of Business and University of Nebraska-Lincoln; MSU also reports 61% participation in the program
- Unpaid internships are highest among liberal arts, marketing, and finance degrees
- Few schools report offering stipends or grants to students for unpaid internships
- Only a handful report charging any fee with orientation workshop or application
- Most schools report 20-30% acceptance of full-time offer with internship employer

⁵ Alternating: vary between internship and school every other semester, parallel: typically work half of a week and attend school the rest, concurrent: usually embraces working full-time and attending some classes



2006 Experience and Education Survey at the Lear Corporation Career Services Center, Michigan State University



Internship and Co-op Pay Rates 2006-2007, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

RESEARCH FINDINGS

To further understand the survey content, additional study was needed. Primary research included phone calls to colleges and a study of all 64 institution's career services websites⁶, plus a review of supplemental material from secondary sources. Statistical data was gathered from these websites, in addition to published figures from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Also considered was university sponsored research, such as the iLabs information included below.

In the summer of 2007, iLabs (UMD's premier research program) conducted a survey of employers and students to assess their needs from a university career placement center. Of particular note, the following key findings were made:⁷

Employer Most-Preferred Services

- 61% want access to undergraduate student resumes
- 57% are interested in viewing these resumes online
- 53% asked for direct job postings online

Employer Least-Preferred Services

- 33% were interested in student social events
- 23% were interested in on-campus interviews
- 13% were interested in phone interviews

Student Most-Requested Services

- Scheduling multiple job interviews with employers currently hiring
- Access to a database that contains information on potential employers
- Coaching on effective salary negotiation techniques

Student Least-Requested Services

- Participating in self-assessment tests to determine strengths and career paths
- Participating in videotaped and critiqued mock job interviews
- Having MBA student peers assist with concerns and employment issues

iLabs Career Placement Center Initiative, 2007

This survey of local employers and students (73% upperclassmen) demonstrates that technology is indeed important. Specifically, employers want access to the students and students want access to employers. These sentiments were echoed in similar studies conducted at Pennsylvania State University and other colleges.

⁶ This investigation was conducted as if the surveyor was a potential student evaluating the program. On many occasions, calls were placed to the main campus career center as well as the business school office and/or career center to gather the most complete information.

⁷ Career Placement Center Initiative Preliminary Findings, courtesy of iLabs: www.umdilabs.com/home

The survey of career services at Penn State found students were more interested in “career services related to acquiring experiences related to their career goals and developing self-marketing skills than for increasing their self-awareness or exploring career options.”⁸ Additionally, about half of the respondents expressed a desire for help in obtaining internships and other work experience. And 40% wanted assistance developing job search strategies. Also of interest, about one-third of respondents attended career days/fairs and career-building workshops. Only 3% of students took advantage of on-campus recruiting.

Table 1: Career Services Needs

To what extent do you feel you need assistance with:	percent ³	average
Obtaining internships and other relevant work experience	49.9	3.37
Job placement	40.3	3.14
Identifying graduate/professional educational options	37.5	3.10
Developing job search strategies	38.1	3.07
Cover letter/resume preparation	34.9	2.94
Identifying career options	33.4	2.92
Interviewing skills	30.9	2.87
Putting together your current academic plan	23.8	2.74
Understanding your career interests and careers that best suit your personality and strengths	23.1	2.57
Overall Career Services Needs		2.97

Scale: 1=not at all; 5=extremely

Table 3: Likelihood of Using Career Services

How likely would you be to visit your campus Career Services department if you wanted to discuss:	percent	average
Options for internships/ co-op programs	73.7	3.96
Job search process/ researching employers	68.2	3.77
Career options	68.0	3.77
How to research/ apply to grad/ professional school	63.8	3.68
Choice of major	58.9	3.48
Cover letter/ resume development	56.9	3.47
Interview process associated with a job search	56.7	3.47
Clarification of your interests, personality factors, and skill sets related to career choice	45.0	3.19
Overall Likelihood of Using Career Services		3.48

Scale: 1=very unlikely; 5=very likely

“Career services and personal counseling needs,” Penn State Pulse, April 2005

The University of California-Berkeley analyzed its career services website. When the site was converted to a highly interactive forum from a static page, hits increased dramatically. This allowed investigation into what drove the most traffic – was it grad-school resources or job search information? The top five articles students accessed clearly demonstrate the need for employment preparedness skills:⁹

1. *Making the First Cut*
2. *10 Most Common Interview Mistakes*
3. *It's Not Too Late (to find a job/internship)*

⁸ “Career services and personal counseling needs,” *Penn State Pulse*, April 2005

⁹ <http://career.berkeley.edu/News/0304.stm/home/>

4. *Recruiters' Feedback on Cal Students' Interviewing Skills*
5. *What Can the Career Center Do For You: Seniors*

Troy Behrens published relevant feedback in his article, “How Employers Can Ace Their Campus and Site Interviews.” Students provided interesting, and perhaps overlooked, advice to employers to maximize the productivity of their recruiting efforts. Students were asked, “What advice would you give to help an employer become more visible on campus and schedule more students for interviews?” A summary of their responses: ¹⁰

- Offer more internships
- Get information out early in the school year
 - Provide career center with more company literature
 - Advertise in the school newspaper
 - Display posters and make classroom presentations
 - Promote the company website
- Attend student organization meetings
- Attend all job fairs
- Bring more employees to campus
- Host fun events on campus

The most effective of these strategies, according to the respondents, includes: attend all job fairs (34%), host information sessions early in the year (26%), provide more internships and more literature (10% each). ¹¹ Here, we discover a disconnect – in most reports, the employers least-preferred services are among what the students are looking for. Although access to information (preferably digital in format) is critical to each, we must develop a means to narrow the gap and build the interpersonal interaction and skills most needed.

Next, we look briefly at a report from Hollins University summarizing employer needs and student misconceptions. In this, the author details the key criteria employers require. Communication and interpersonal skills lead the list; it is also noted that “70% of successful job searches depend on personal contacts.” ¹² The article describes how networking and internships can be crucial for today’s future employees as more companies are using the internship approach to attract and “test-drive” employees before hiring them outright.

This report addresses common myths that must be overcome, too. Students may not realize that “less than 5% of non-technical jobs are filled from online applications.” ¹³ In addition, students should understand the intricacies of the job search; especially not to disregard old postings or less-known job boards. The career center can take an important role in helping students understand the active and dynamic job search process.

¹⁰ <http://www.iusb.edu/~sbcareer/aceinterviews.shtml>

¹¹ <http://www.iusb.edu/~sbcareer/aceinterviews.shtml>

¹² <http://www.hollins.edu/careers/developctr/trends.htm>

¹³ <http://www.hollins.edu/careers/developctr/trends.htm>

We return to the iLabs study to examine the current attributes of career centers. Our goal is to identify the current standard and specialized offerings commonly observed in today's competitive market. More so, can we expose unmet needs that our career services and internship offices can address to better prepare students for experiential learning and future employment?

*Common Attributes of Career Centers Identified by iLabs*¹⁴

- Job fairs and seminars
- Computer and printer available for students
- Online job postings
- Resume help and sample resumes
- Interview help, including mock interviews
- Career advising

Value added attributes iLabs mentions include: individual assessment tests, use of conference room with fax and copier, salary and negotiation help, assistance for international job-seekers, and career development classes. Some specialized offerings included a mentorship program, advisor specialization, help in relocation, group interviews, and greater accessibility (e.g., through instant messaging). In this survey, 36% of students were willing to pay a nominal fee for access or services.¹⁵ However, in our internship survey only three of the 64 institutions reported a fee being assessed. This is a \$5-15 charge to attend career workshops or gain access to an online database.

The last question we investigated was assessing the value of credit. From the information above, we learn that academic credit is typically granted in conjunction with a coursework requirement. In a business school environment, a student is expected to place emphasis on building professional skills and better understand the discipline. When an academic requirement is added, the value of an internship increases; this is a result of the reflection and analysis accompanying the experiential learning.

A few colleges reported the use of additive credit, although it is primarily used to grant credit for prior work experience. This represents situations where there is essentially no academic development or career growth. The College of New Jersey has an excellent definition of additive credit for review:

*Additive credit is given for certain courses which may be required of a student but are not counted toward graduation. These courses may be graded either Pass/Unsatisfactory or with a letter grade, but in either case are not included in a student's GPA or in the determination of the dean's list or graduation with honors. Courses given for additive credit are considered credit-bearing for the purposes of financial aid, tuition, and the determination of full-time student status.*¹⁶

¹⁴ Career Placement Center Initiative Preliminary Findings, courtesy of iLabs: www.umdilabs.com/home

¹⁵ Career Placement Center Initiative Preliminary Findings, courtesy of iLabs: www.umdilabs.com/home

¹⁶ <http://www.tcnj.edu/~recreg/policies/additive.html>

Additive credit is atypical of the internship experience. Even when there was little or no required academic content, it appeared the career services or internship office would evaluate the position for value-added content and the opportunity to explore the professions of a chosen major. For all intents and purposes, additive credit is neither recommended nor commonly applied in a quality educational setting.

Of a final note: The iLabs team found that career centers tend to shy away from the term “placement” as it implies a guaranteed job. Instead, these offices thought of themselves as advisors and brokers of information to help better prepare students in their employment journey.¹⁷

DISCUSSION

In revisiting our objective, we conclude that several factors contribute to a meaningful and productive experiential learning experience. Analysis is provided on three fronts: the experience itself, the role of administrative/educational support, and best meeting the needs of all stakeholders.

Experiential Learning

The data suggests that the internship program is most successful – measured by student participation, gained knowledge, hiring rate, and level of institutional involvement – when it meets these common criteria:

- Paid, real-world professional work experience within the chosen discipline
- Academic credit contingent on completion of suitable and relevant coursework
- Student is prepared for success with proper orientation and stated expectations

Students, and employers, are asking for internships; the former seeks to build skills and work experience, the latter seeks potential full-time employees without long-term commitments. Especially in a business environment, students can expect a wage of about 60-70% of an entry-level position salary. Full credit should be offered based on the corresponding workload and internship structure (e.g., parallel, alternating, concurrent). Tuition should appropriately be assessed, as well.

In considering a grade system, the pass/fail option provides many advantages, namely an indication of success – for example, in a job one is hired or fired. A pass grade is equivalent to “being eligible for re-hire.” However, this method often ignores computation in the GPA and may not provide adequate motivation for top performance. One option may be to use a similar system, but with an A/F grade system to represent the pass/fail scheme.

As a prerequisite, in particular for traditional students with limited work experience, a professional orientation class or seminar should be required. This would be designed to

¹⁷ Career Placement Center Initiative Preliminary Findings, courtesy of iLabs: www.umdilabs.com/home

equip the student with necessary interpersonal skills and review behavioral expectations. Most colleges reserve internships for upper-class students. This is a recommended practice to first let students get core curriculum under their belt. However, it would be advantageous to start the internship/career services process early in their education. This would get students thinking – and preparing – for opportunities. And increased exposure, along with increased competition, will enhance the value of and participation in such a program.

Institutional Support

To adequately provide structure and resources for an experiential learning program, we must examine the role of administrators and professors in the student's experience. It is presumed that a common goal of all programs is to fundamentally provide a personal-growth opportunity for every student to utilize in their employment search. Accordingly, necessary objectives should include the following:

- Early and frequent communication about services offered and steps to take
- Assistance in obtaining an internship, preferably through internal resources
- Workshops to develop interpersonal, communication, and interviewing skills
- Help with job search/company research, negotiation strategy, and resume building
- Increased use of technology-based systems and greater program accessibility

First we note that, even if many programs are reserved for upper-class students, it is imperative to educate lower-class students on these future opportunities and the steps to prepare for them. Skill-building workshops or classes should be available early in one's academic career in order to maximize participation and effectiveness. Indeed, students clearly make this request heard. Overwhelmingly, students feel these programs should be free (covered in the cost of tuition).

We must also consider the necessary topics to cover; students may not request help developing communication skills – but to employers such proficiency is often the number one priority. Also, as the Hollins University summary pointed out, misconceptions abound regarding job search techniques and strategies. If it falls on the school to prepare our future employees, it follows that they must actively provide the information to best help these students today.

Another concern is meeting employer's expectations while operating within a typically constrained budget. There is a solution that addresses this issue and simultaneously optimizes the experiential learning program. As we see, the largest variance in responses was attributed to the survey question attempting to determine high-tech versus high-touch implementation. Digital administration is currently the best tool to manage a growing number of internships, but we must be careful to not eliminate the personal engagement. Since approximately half of the surveyed programs utilize a significant contact approach, how can we best use technology to advance the program without quality suffering?

Technology, specifically online administration and databases, can be used to free critical resources and actually expand most experiential learning programs. Many schools already require that the student independently find a faculty advisor to oversee the academic portion of the internship. This may be helpful, but there is room for enhancement. A database of participating faculty can be created allowing students to effectively benefit from a “specialized advisor.” This faculty member would oversee the internship and act as an educational mentor to the student for the duration of the engagement. Maximizing the efficiency of such a plan requires a centralized effort with the internship/career services office acting as overall coordinator. The office then can focus its resources on building participation, hosting workshops, and building employer relations.

The last part of this discussion also addresses a very important student request. A majority ask that the school offer more internship placements as well as provide greater assistance in finding them. The ideal situation involves the school coordinating and developing programs with interested employers – instead of referring students to outside websites and portals. Such steps increase the quality, relevance, and knowledge gained from the experience.

Online administration eases the process formalities; paperwork, progress reports, and grading can be accomplished through this system. More time is freed to interact with the students and employers and better prepare them for future employment. This addresses another request of students and employers alike. The online component can be used to increase access to resumes, company information, and communicate with the administration and faculty advisors.

Lastly, internship and career services offices should not neglect marketing their offerings. Through campus-wide email, banners, advertisements in the school newspaper, and a strong presence at orientation, these offices must take an active role in promoting themselves. Involving student ambassadors and alumni would be a meaningful and cost-effective way to spread the word about the possible opportunities ahead for students. Increasing student and employer participation is in the interest of the entire school. Highly sought-after programs will increase enrollment and further develop contributions to society-at-large.

Employers

The remaining issue to address is meeting the needs of the employer stakeholder to create a positive experience for all parties. While we addressed a primary concern, using technology to bridge the information gap, internship and career services offices must help employers connect to today’s students. Some key recommendations are noted here:

- Attend all relevant job fairs – not just select dates and times
- Increase visibility on campus – provide more information and representatives
- Host events for students to learn more about the company and positions
- Offer more internships and experiences for student-involvement

In sum, the main issue to overcome is increasing accessibility to information and opportunities. For the employer, this includes maintaining a presence on campus (via sponsorships, advertising, and/or student ambassadors) and creating opportunities for experiential learning. An increased focus on the technology component will allow both employer and career services staff more time to build these relationships and market programs to the students.

Most employer-initiated concerns have been addressed through the student and administrative perspectives presented above. By better educating students and streamlining the process, we can truly create a high-performance learning experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Concluding, we present the following as key components of a successful internship experience:

- Early and frequent communication about services offered and steps to take
- Orientation and professional skills development seminars prior to experience
- A paid work experience, with adequate challenge, relevant to the chosen major
- Full academic credit offered upon completion of appropriate coursework content
- Increased accessibility to counselors, professors, and employers

These suggestions mandate an organizational timeline; that is, to provide the best experience to the most students, a college must develop the ideal internship-path. This starts with early communication of the process a student needs to follow, from attending a required orientation to finding the internship and applying to successfully completing the assignment. Identifying this path is three-fold: creating a system and structure for the process, managing the students and employer relationships, and finally, monitoring and grading the experience.

From the research, it appears that most improvements in the internship process can be made within the career services office (or academic unit if applicable). It is here that technology solutions can be implemented, including instant messaging capability or hosted services such as CareerBeam¹⁸ to maximize resources and efficiency. The college must determine the structure of the program, too – what curriculum or seminars need to be added and how do we best create opportunities for the students? In the author’s view, developing long-term relationships with employers and coordinating the interview process internally presents a far more enriching experience than directing students to external resources. This essentially leaves the student to “fend for himself” and may discourage, or even prevent, students from applying.

By freeing the staffer’s and employer’s time with better use of technology, more time can be devoted to soliciting new employers and hosting fairs at which students can learn more about the companies, professions, and even pre-interview for positions. To increase

¹⁸ An example of a “virtual career success center,” accessible at <http://www.careerbeam.com>

student participation, the career services office must undertake a marketing campaign to develop awareness of the program. The process should begin immediately in the student's academic career to avoid potential delays later. A strong presence at orientation, or even a mandatory professional skills class, may be the basis for educating students about the rewards of experiential learning. In instances in which internships are limited to upper-class level students, it is critical to have this communication before the sophomore year for proper planning.

Managing the relationships between students, professors, and employers can be greatly improved with technology as well. This is best suited for assistance in communication, research, project updates, and grading. As the survey shows, the majority of schools believe in a "high-touch" philosophy wherein a high level of personal interaction is involved. This should remain a key point to any program, but the technology aspect can be used to lessen the administrative minutiae and bolster the experience. When no other system exists, it can be used to link students with potential employers and even the department professors that will oversee their internship. Fundamentally, the personal interaction should derive from the experience and advisor support (before and during), rather than the challenge of finding prospective employers and professors to guide the internship.

The actual monitoring of the experiential learning can be personally and technologically interactive. Students may submit learning contracts, progress reports, and even final papers through the online component. The system can notify advisors of missed deadlines as well as remind them of monthly meetings. However, this should be used as a tool to supplement the experience rather than become solely a tool for supervision. Lastly, the system may be able to synchronize with the main school computers to upload grades and update transcripts.

So, what makes for the most meaningful and productive experiential learning experience? The research clearly demonstrates key features of a working experiential learning model. Yet, it also highlights some best practices and allows discussion of possible trends in the coming years, particularly the growing influence of online management systems. Most likely we can expect to not only witness more online administration, but also the improvements such a system allows for. Notably, these include time to develop the program, increase participation, and build better relationships with students and potential employers. Ongoing research is recommended to study this trend, especially as it meets – or leaves opportunities to meet – the needs of students and employers alike.

CREDIT

Kerry Thompson, a School of Management Senior at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, prepared this report in fulfillment of an Honors Program requirement. Responsibilities included: compiling and quantifying survey data, conducting further phone and internet research, providing analysis and discussion of the topic, and presenting a formal report with graphic presentation.

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Personal interview and analysis of career services websites of the 64 surveyed organizations. These schools were primarily Midwestern four-year universities, but respondents included thirteen two-year vocational and community colleges and several schools outside the immediate region.