

RESTRUCTURING THE MARKETING INTERNSHIP PROGRAM: A MODEL

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Abstract

The number of business students participating in some form of internship prior to graduation is significant and growing, with 90% of AACSB schools reporting that over 50% of their students had completed an internship in 2012 (Hoyle and Goffnett 2013). This renewed interest in internships is driven by a number of factors. First, employers report that marketing graduates lack critical professional and career development skills (Gault et al. 2010; Kelley and Bridges 2005; Swanson and Tomkovick 2011, 2012) and internships are one curricular means of developing them. AACSB's recently revised standards for student skill development and learning outcomes reflect the perspective that we are training professionals for a career in business, not liberal arts graduates (AACSB 2010). Second, students perceive internships (and other experiential, active, real-world learning activities) to be more enjoyable, challenging and, most importantly, of strategic importance in gaining employment in their field after graduation (Cook et al. 2004; Gault et al. 2000, 2010; Gupta et al. 2010; Karns 2005). Third, empirical support for the positive relationship between a business internship and career success has been increasing (Gault et al. 2000, 2010): students who complete an internship are more likely to obtain their first job more quickly after graduation, list more networking contacts, report higher entry level salaries, and have greater overall job satisfaction. Last, and perhaps most important, a greater number of employers are beginning to utilize internships as a tool for recruitment and retention of college graduates (Gault et al. 2000, 2010).

Given the increased importance placed on the internship experience by both students and employers, it is surprising that so little has been written, at least recently, regarding its changing role in the overall business curriculum and, more specifically, concerning whether and how the internship program *content* should be re-designed. Thus, the focus of this paper/presentation is on how one particular internship – a marketing internship program at a Northwest public university -- was recently re-structured in light of these trends and research findings. The paper details the why and how of this re-structuring effort; the new structure and content of the internship course/program can be found here: <http://faculty.wvu.edu/bryce/480syIW11.pdf>. One of the key changes was to specify new learning objectives and assessment methods, based on a review of the literature and discussions with marketing professionals (Table 1).

Since the restructuring of the program in 2012, internship participation has doubled; 50% of marketing majors now complete an internship prior to graduation. Further, the incidence of paid internships has increased from 20% prior to 2012 to 40% currently. 50% of interns now receive job offers from their internship employer, although only 25% accept them. Findings from an exit survey also indicate significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the internship experience since the restructuring efforts.

It is too early to determine whether the long-term quality of our marketing graduates will improve with these modifications to just one course, particularly since the internship program/course is an elective course in the marketing major, not a required one. However, if we are to transform marketing education so that a more “professional school” approach to teaching and learning marketing is taken - a transformation that is sorely needed if we are to meet the demands of the 21st century marketplace - then changes to the internship program such as those suggested in this paper are a step, albeit a small one, in the right direction. See Table 1 below.

References Available upon Request

Table 1: Summary

Learning Obj/Skills Acq.	Method of Assessment (Learning Activities)
Career Goals and Strategy	One page reflective essay on topic with rationale for type(s) of internship sought (e.g. ad agency, marketing research firm) and locale
Resume Preparation	With career goals in mind, review/revise resume drafts prior to submission to internship employers
Job Search Methods	Instruction** on how to search internship databases; criteria to use in light of career goals
Interviewing Skills	Career center class taken + instruction on pre-interview preparation, post-interview follow-up
Salary Negotiation	Role playing exercises and instruction ; determination of how important compensation is to student
Business Etiquette and Attire	Instruction given; books recommended ; discussion of corporate culture based on observations during interview
Written Communication Skills	As part of job description, intern must produce several written documents (e.g. marketing plan, marketing research report, web site, press releases); employer letters of evaluation (midterm and final) ; Portfolio ; weekly meetings/emails between student and professor
Presentation Skills	As part of job description, intern must make one formal presentation on an assigned project; employer letters of evaluation ; Portfolio ; weekly meetings/emails
Leadership Skills	As part of job description, intern is responsible for one project start to finish that requires initiative and teamwork; employer letters of evaluation ; Portfolio ; weekly meetings/emails
Portfolio Development Skills	Professional Portfolio of all work completed during the internship, to be turned in at the end of the internship; see Appendix 2; employer is made aware of the importance of assigning projects with tangible output for the intern's Portfolio
Skills Assessment	One page summary of skills acquired ; included in Portfolio; midterm and final letters of evaluation from employer
Ability to apply textbook marketing concepts in real world setting (e.g. mktg plan/MR study)	Examination of these documents in Portfolio

* These skills are taken from Kelley and Bridges 2005. ** "Instruction" refers to a one-on-one discussion between the student and the professor or internship coordinator.