

COMMUNITY SERVICE MARKETING INTERNSHIPS: WIN, WIN, WIN

Charles S. Sherwood, Sid Craig School of Business, California State University, Fresno
5245 N. Backer M/S 7, Fresno, CA 93740-8001 (209-278-4972)

Paul DeRuosi, Career Development Center, California State University, Fresno
5150 N. Maple M/S 120, Fresno, CA 93740-8026 (209-278-5052)

ABSTRACT

An increasing number of university programs are being developed to better prepare students not only for their school to career transition, but also their transition into the mainstream of society. Traditionally these programs focus either on service learning or practical experience via internships. California State University-Fresno has implemented a program in the Craig School of Business which has resulted in expanded opportunities for marketing students to engage in both an internship and community service. This paper describes how the barriers to this type of program were overcome and provides insight for other schools who wish to provide an educational experience which benefits not only students but the school and community as well.

INTRODUCTION

Service learning and internships are two topics receiving increased attention by collegiate schools of business. The attention is driven by a desire to produce graduates who are not only prepared to meet the challenges of a business career, but also willing to become actively involving in their community. University programs which can address both the school to career transition and service learning issues simultaneously can be especially beneficial to all individuals and organizations involved.

The purpose of the following paper is to describe just such a program which was recently implemented for marketing students in the Craig School of Business at California State University-Fresno. The program itself is built around three very familiar elements: internships, service learning, and scholarships. It combines marketing students, the business school, private donors, and the local community into an alliance aimed at achieving multiple goals. As is the case with many innovative concepts, a series of academic and administrative barriers had to be overcome before

the program could be implemented.

COMBINING INTERNSHIPS, COMMUNITY SERVICE, AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Recent studies only reinforce what marketing educators already know about the benefits of internships (Kelley 1996) (Watson 1995) (Bell 1994) (McCombs and Van Syckle 1994). Also well documented are the benefits associated with students performing community service as our society begins to rely more and more on local organizations and agencies to help solve social problems (Hanna 1995) (Cohen and Raupp 1992). Finally, the need for financial assistance is becoming increasingly important as the cost of education continues to rise at both public and private institutions. One educator has estimated that by the year 2005, over 70% of the students in California colleges will require some form of financial assistance (Munitz 1995).

Initial attempts to combine internships with community service and scholarships suffered from a series of both internal and external problems (Kendall 1994). The first of these problems is an administrative and resource barrier. Administrative support at a university flows to activities and programs which are specifically tied to a vision or mission statement, related to goals, or part of a strategic plan. Community service concepts and school to career transition needs may not be integrated into the mission and goals of the university, schools, or departments. While administrators often like to emphasize the university's role as a vital member of the community, they often fail to match their rhetoric with tangible resources.

A second barrier could be called the legitimacy barrier. From the academic side, there have been some concerns about the legitimacy of a community service experience as a business internship. Problems commonly arise when trying to balance the needs of the community organization, student

learning goals, and academic requirements for credit.

The third barrier can result when a student is viewed as a volunteer instead of an intern. Community service agencies may not be familiar with the concept of an internship and end up treating interns as they would any other volunteer help. Experiences are not structured around learning objectives, a trait commonly associated with traditional internships. This can result in a work experience with little or no structure and too much repetitive activity.

The final barrier is a philosophical one. Community service should be, by definition, an unpaid experience. After all, one does not typically volunteer their time and then expect compensation. Unfortunately, increasing educational costs and student budget realities often result in excellent learning opportunities being passed by because they are not compensated.

OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS

Conquering the Administrative/Resource Barrier

The University's "Plan for the 90's" envisioned a learning environment which challenges:

"students, faculty, staff and the community to work together to develop productive citizens; and engages students in their cooperative education, community service related activities."

This vision initially led to the development of a general education community service course which required students to volunteer at a local agency. Some of these experiences turned out to be very valuable opportunities for students in a variety of disciplines, including marketing. In addition, a major University donor funded a series of \$1,000 "Community Service Scholarships" for students who completed 200 hours of work with a not-for-profit agency.

At the School of Business level, the mission called for, among other things, a commitment to provide "the community with the best possible service." In addition, it was a goal of the school to achieve prominence as an applied business program. To this end, the strategic plan calls for an increase in the number of internship opportunities made available for students.

In order to make the program a reality in the School of Business, it was necessary to commit resources to both internship and community service scholarship programs. Using the commitments cited in the planning documents it became easier to obtain support for a program which involved combining community service and business internships.

The initial result was partial release time for a business faculty member and the commitment of \$18,000 worth of scholarship money over the next three years. This allocation was immediately matched by a major University donor resulting in a total of forty eight scholarships (of \$750 each). In addition, a partnership was formed with the University Career Development Center which had been directly involved in the initial development of both service learning courses and the driving force behind the creating of community service scholarships. The Center was used to develop new opportunities, provide student guidance, and also as a source of additional scholarship funds. Therefore, by tying the program to administrative priorities and creating a working partnership with the Career Development Center the first barrier was overcome.

Addressing the Legitimacy Barrier

Traditionally, business internship programs have relied on for profit businesses as their primary work stations. While some students may have volunteered at a service agency, business departments did not view this work as being academically related and therefore unworthy of academic credit. However, there are many reasons why community service organizations may be used as a legitimate source of quality internships. Perhaps the most obvious reason is the number of agencies willing to hire interns, assimilate them into the organization, and allow them to accomplish their learning objectives. In short, there is often a greater degree of commitment to learning than under more traditional internships.

When considering the academic legitimacy of these internships, most faculty realize that there is a great deal of similarity between the nature of the business activities in both profit and non-profit organizations. This is especially true today in the area of marketing. Virtually every non-profit agency is faced with having to improve their marketing program via more attention to marketing strategy, database marketing, and the design of services to

meet customer needs. In these areas, marketing students can often provide real value added since many organizations are staffed by volunteers with virtually no experience in marketing. For example, rarely will a student generate and implement an entire marketing plan, or even a portion of that plan for a business as part of an internship. In addition, students are being asked to design databases utilizing many of the same computer tools they would use at more traditional work stations.

From the student's perspective, community service assignments can provide two additional benefits similar to traditional internships. First, interns can be made aware of career opportunities they had not considered. A prime example is in the area of health care marketing when an internship is completed at a local medical facility. The other benefit relates to an access to a valuable network of business contacts. Fund raising events, donor recognition, and other similar activities often expose the student to an important network of community leaders. Internships completed at a Chamber of Commerce provide many opportunities to get to know local business executives. A third student benefit, which is not part of a traditional internship, is the new perspective they gain into the intrinsic rewards and demands of community service.

Finally, from a pedagogical perspective, there is little difference between the requirements of a community service internships and a business internship. With a focus on the broadening of knowledge, application of skills, career awareness, and personal development, the emphasis is still on the learning that takes place, not what the student is doing. Assessment of the experience in both types of internships rely on establishment of learning objectives, reflective journals or papers, and post assignment evaluation.

Confronting the Volunteer Versus Intern Barrier

Learning requirements associated with internships necessitates that student interns be treated differently than a volunteer. Volunteers are there to perform some required tasks; the intern is there to engage in a progressive learning experience. In some cases they may actually perform similar activities, but the tasks are approached from different perspectives.

To assist in overcoming this barrier, agencies were asked to submit proposals for internships describing

how the student would be utilized and the type of activities they would perform. Emphasis was placed on the progressive nature of the learning experience along with the ability to build new skills and apply academic concepts. Such proposals force the agency to think through a project or series of activities which would lead to a desired goal for the organization. Marketing professors were used to qualify the positions for academic credit. Ultimately, scholarship work stations were selected based on the clarity of activities and goals for the internship and their relevance to the academic major involved.

To insure compliance with job description activities, interns and work station supervisors are required to develop a list of learning objectives for the student during the first two weeks of the internship. Objectives must be approved by the internship coordinator and become the basis for ultimate evaluation of the internship experience. During the internship, interns are instructed to discuss any major deviations with both their supervisor and the coordinator.

The Final Barrier: Pay For Community Service

The final barrier is a philosophical one involving payment for performing community service. Some academics feel that all internships should be unpaid. Others feel that interns perform a valuable service and should be compensated, not exploited. In the case of community service, however, service is normally done for selfless or charitable reasons. Paying someone to "volunteer" is a contradiction.

On the other side, financial realities often keep students from doing unpaid internships, regardless of the nature of the organization. As stated at the beginning of this paper, the majority of students by the year 2005 will qualify for financial aid. In addition, 75 percent of these same students will be working 30 hours a week or more (Munitz 1995). The problem is that this work usually involves part-time jobs which are not related to their academic major, contributing dollars but not to learning. Providing a student with a \$750 scholarship allows them to cut back on part time work hours while gaining relevant experience.

A second source of support for community service scholarships comes from donors to the scholarship program itself. Businesses and individuals are often solicited for funds by the School or University.

These donations can sometimes disappear into a general account, such as faculty development, resulting in little visible connection between a donation and its outcome or impact. Community Service Scholarships are very specific. The money is spent supporting students (student wins) who are performing community service (service organization wins). The donor can publicize their efforts by pointing to the hours of service provided by the student (company or donor wins) and the University is viewed as providing assistance to the community (University wins). As one donor described the program, "the only thing that bothers me about this program is that I can't find anything wrong with it!"

THE RESULTS

The Community Service Scholarship

The Community Service Program at the University level, established in 1990, has serviced over 200 students and attracted over thirty donors. Thousands of hours of community service have been completed. Many of the experiences would have qualified as business internships, but the lack of coordination between the School of Business, Career Development/ Cooperative Education Office, service agencies, and students resulted in lost opportunities for academic credit for both the students and the Marketing Department.

Since implementing the program at the School of Business level, all community service scholarship positions relating to marketing are approved and supervised by the Internship Coordinator in the School of Business. The first of these were completed during the summer of 1996. Additional community service positions were solicited, resulting in a total of 26 openings related to marketing. Scholarships were awarded to nine agencies, and all but one were filled. In addition, five agencies were able to attract marketing majors who were willing to accept their internship experience without pay. An additional eight scholarships will be awarded in the Spring 1997 semester.

The business major most sought after by community service agencies is marketing. Of the 46 community service internship positions qualified in the Summer of 1996, more than half were in marketing. Common activities include development of marketing plans, conducting surveys, making public presentations, building data bases, and creating promotional materials. Examples of

organizations receiving marketing scholarships include St. Agnus Medical Center, Fresno Philharmonic, County Volunteer Bureau, Big Brother/Big Sisters, Valley Children's Hospital, and the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

CONCLUSION

Based on the initial results of the program described in this paper, it is fully expected that the partnerships developed are only beginning to realize their potential. When properly supervised and structured to meet academic requirements, the combination of internships and service learning can produce learning outcomes that often exceed those provided through traditional assignments. At the same time, students obtain academic and career related skills, while gaining a realistic perspective of their community, its people and some of the problems faced by our increasingly complex society.

REFERENCES

- Bell, Justine (1994). "Marketing Academic Internships in the Public Sector," Public Personnel Management (Fall), 23(3), pp. 481-486.
- Cohen, D. and Raupp, C. (1992). "A Thousand Points of Light/Illuminate the Psychology Curriculum: Volunteering as a Learning Experience," Teaching Psychology, pp. 27-28.
- Hanna, H. (1995). "Volunteering for Credit," California Schools, p. 48.
- Kelley, Bill (1996). "Hire Education," Human Resource Executive, (August), pp. 24-27.
- Kendall, Jane C. (1994). "Combining Service and Learning: An Introduction for Cooperative Education Professionals." Journal of Cooperative Education, 27(2), pp. 9-26.
- McCombs, Gary B. and VanSyckle, Larry D. (1994). "Accounting Internships: A Win-Win Arrangement," The National Public Accountant, (May), 39(5), pp. 21-23
- Munitz, Barry (1995). From a speech "The Education of the New California Workforce", December 11, 1995, San Francisco, CA.
- Watson, Bibi S. (1995). "The intern turnaround," Management Review, (June) 84(6), pp. 9-13.