

AN EXPLORATION OF STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES IN MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Business internships have become increasingly important and popular in students' learning and career preparation. We conducted a study among eighty-eight business interns to understand the level of satisfaction that marketing students experience from completing internships. Using a factor analysis, this study identified several factors relevant to students' satisfaction with internships. Several hypotheses were proposed linking relevant factors and satisfaction with internships. Students' satisfaction with their internships was found to be related to nature of the internship experience and the benefits received. Based on the findings of this study, some implications were drawn for the students and universities.

JEL: M3

KEYWORDS: Marketing Internships, Student Satisfaction, Internships

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the primary goal of education has been the successful transfer of information to students – students have been viewed to be vessels to fill with knowledge (Freire, 1998). Recently, several have questioned whether traditional pedagogical methods, such as lecture, are truly beneficial to students' education (e.g., Bringle & Hatcher, 2003). Guyton (2000), for instance, views traditional pedagogical methods as being responsible for turning students into passive underachievers and Bransford and Vye (1989) speak of an “inert knowledge problem” – a situation where students possess a significant amount of knowledge but are unable to apply that knowledge to real world problems or to make the transition from memory to action. Consequently, many in higher education have called for widespread changes in classroom pedagogy (e.g., Jacoby, 1996).

Similarly, growing criticism has been developing over the nature of business education by business practitioners and by AACSB, the primary accrediting body of collegiate schools of business (AACSB, 1996). Candy and Crebert (1991), for instance, state that although recent business graduates are full of information and theories, they are generally not prepared to solve problems or to make decisions. It is believed that this shortcoming arises from a growing disconnect between the abstract and theoretical bias of business schools and the dynamic practical business environment (Angelidis, Tomic & Ibrahim, 2004). Indeed, some graduates feel their education has not prepared them to enter the business world (Maskooki, Rama & Raghunandan, 1998). This is an issue of importance to marketing educators since preparing students for successful careers in marketing is an important goal of marketing educators. Hence, what and how marketing educators teach their students should arguably be directly affected by the needs of the workplace (Kelley & Bridges, 2005). In response, AACSB has called for increasing ties between business schools and the business community (Maskooki, Rama & Raghunandan, 1998).

The call of AACSB has resulted in a re-examination of the pedagogy used in many marketing programs (Duke, 2000; Elam & Spotts, 2004). Frontczak (1995) states “the move from a traditional, theoretical, positive knowledge-transfer approach to an experiential, interactive method of learning is becoming the norm for marketing educators” (1998, p. 25). More recently, Karns (2005) suggested that this move is

continuing. Although agreement does not exist on a single definition for experiential learning (Frontczak, 1998), the definition of Sakofs, who defined experiential education as “a philosophical orientation toward teaching and learning that values and encourages linkages between concrete educative activities and abstract lessons to maximize learning” (1995, p. 149) has several adherents. Experiential education seems to be consistent with the needs expressed by AACSB since experiential education in marketing has the potential to foster direct contact between students and the business community. Consequently, experiential learning activities have become much more commonplace in marketing classrooms (Gremier, Hoffman, Keaveney & Wright, 2000).

One form of experiential education in marketing which appears to address several of the shortcomings observed in business education by AACSB is internships (Maskooki, Rama & Raghunandan, 1998; Mello, 2006). Internships provide direct business contact for students, usually in an employment setting. As a result, the use of internships in marketing education has become more common (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000). The purpose of this study is to extend knowledge of internships in marketing by identifying the factors associated with higher student satisfaction with the internship experience. Knowledge of these factors will help marketing educators more effectively market internship experiences to their students.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, past research on internships is reviewed and students’ satisfaction with internships is explored. Second, the study is developed and hypotheses are presented. Finally, the results are reported and discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internships

Student involvement in the business world, such as that facilitated by internships, is not something new. The University of Cincinnati, for instance, initiated their co-op program over a century ago (1906) (Thiel & Hartley, 1997). Internships involve students working with and for businesses in a fashion so that they can become more acquainted with the business world and have a context to apply the knowledge gained from their classwork to real business situations. The purpose of internships is “to provide a planned transition from the classroom to the job” (Coco, 2000, p. 41) and “prepare students with realistic expectations of their future careers and to provide them with opportunities to polish career skills and to gain on-the-job experience” (Paulins, 2008, pp. 105-106). Common characteristics of internships include a specific number of work hours, academic credit, and oversight from a faculty member or other university representative (DiLorenzo-Aiss & Mathisen, 1996). Furthermore, internships can be paid or unpaid (DiLorenzo-Aiss & Mathisen, 1996). Divine, Linrud, Miller, and Wilson (2007) note that approximately 90 percent of colleges offer internships or similar experiences.

Several researchers have listed the benefits that students are believed to gain from participating in internships. Coco (2000), for instance, identifies five benefits: 1) ability to relate classroom concepts to practical applications, 2) improved knowledge of industry career paths, 3) crystallization of interests and career ambitions, 4) reduced shock upon entering the workplace, and 5) faster advancement. Maskooki, Rama, and Raghunandan (1998) identify (1) experience integrating material from the classroom to the workplace, (2) introduction to available careers, (3) developing good work habits, and (4) increased chances of finding employment. These lists, however, are inferred and are not the results of direct empirical research.

Empirical research also attests to the benefits students receive by participating in internships. Hite and Bellizzi (1986) observed that internships in marketing help students to crystallize their job interests and were viewed by students as a more valuable experience than case courses or guest speakers. Several,

including Fang, Lee, Lee, and Huang (2004) and Gault, Redington, and Schlager (2000) have observed that students participating in internships receive a greater number of job offers than those who do not. Gault, Redington, and Schlager (2000) also observed that business school alumni who participated in an internship believe they receive higher initial compensation and experience greater job satisfaction than those who did not. Cook, Parker, and Pettijohn (2004) observed that internship students believe that their internship provide them with interpersonal skills, helped them relate knowledge gained from the classroom to the workplace, helped them to mature, influenced their career goals, and made them more confident in obtaining a job upon graduation. Karns (2005) observed that marketing students view internships as the most effective pedagogy (out of 21 different alternatives) and as being highly preferred (behind only field trips and multiple-choice exams in desirability). Finally, Schneider and Andre (2005) note that business students believe that an internship had significantly helped them to prepare for writing in the workplace.

Others also see benefits for students from being involved in internships during their education. Recruiters, for instance, believe that internships enhance student skills and their preparation to enter the workforce (Knemeyer & Murphy, 2001). In response to the apparent benefits to students from being involved in internships, European business schools often require internships (Adler & Loughrin-Sacco, 2003). Similarly, Cook, Parker and Pettijohn (2004) suggest that the rapid growth in internships is evidence that internships provide numerous benefits to both employers and students.

Satisfaction with an Internship Experience

Although some suggest that participating in an internship should be a required component of students majoring in marketing (as Jenkins states “unfortunately too many schools consider undergraduate internships to be add-ons, instead of integral parts of the educational experience” (2009, p. 54)), most internships offered in departments of marketing continue to be offered as electives (Divine, Linrud, Miller & Wilson, 2007). Consequently, in most marketing departments, the internship must be marketed to students to entice them pursue the opportunity. Although the evidence illustrates that students benefit from internship experiences and are cognizant of the benefits, many students still choose not to pursue an internship.

As an elective, it is logical to expect that the choice of many marketing students to, or not to, pursue an internship will be affected by the word-of-mouth they receive from other students. Although many faculty marketing faculty members actively try to promote the advantages of pursuing an internship, the relatively higher time commitment required by most marketing internships (when compared to “ordinary” courses) creates challenges. Word-of-mouth from students who have completed satisfying internship experiences can be expected to play a significant role in the choices of other students to pursue an internship.

Paulins (2008) notes additional advantages which accrue from satisfying internship experiences. She suggests that students whose internship experiences are satisfying will have more positive feelings toward the career search process and toward their academic institution. She also suggests that students with satisfying internship experiences will be better able to contribute to their companies when they ultimately begin their careers. Paulins (2008) observed that the following internship qualities are related to satisfaction with an internship in retailing: information and feedback from supervisors, variety of activities, closure with tasks, clear results of tasks, autonomy, and networking opportunities. Unfortunately, since Paulins examined only retailing interns and since her study possessed methodological shortcomings, the generalizability of the results is limited.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the level of satisfaction that marketing students experience from completing internships. Based on the findings of Paulins (2008), qualities associated

with the internship experience itself seem to be able to affect the level of satisfaction students perceive. Hence, the following hypothesis seems appropriate.

H1: Students express higher satisfaction with internships that provide positive experiences and for which they perceive greater personal benefits.

Since enhancing employability and facilitating the subsequent job search process (increasing the ease by which future employment can be gained) are viewed as primary reasons to participate in an internship, the following hypothesis is appropriate.

H2: Students who perceive that their job prospects are improved as a result of their internship are more satisfied with their internship.

Finally, the relationships between time spent by students in internships (duration of the internship experience and hours spent per week as an intern), compensation received from the internship, and student ability (measured by classroom success as assessed by GPA) and satisfaction with the internship were examined. Given the lack of research suggesting relationship direction, the following hypothesis was examined.

H3: No relationship exists between time spent by students in their internship, the compensation received, and their GPA and satisfaction they receive from their internship.

METHODOLOGY

The sample was comprised of business students who had recently completed an internship. The data was gathered from students attending several different colleges and universities located in a Midwestern state. The resulting sample consisted of 88 students. Approximately 65 percent of the sample consisted of female students.

To assess the experience and the benefits students receive from participating in an internship, 39 scale items were developed. The items were gathered from a review of several sources which have examined similar issues (e.g. Cook, Parker & Pettijohn, 2004; Fang, Lee, Lee & Huang, 2004; Scholz, Steiner, & Hansmann, 2003). A new list of scale items was developed for this study since existing lists did not seem to cover the entire domain.

A factor analysis was run to identify the underlying factors. Nine factors with an eigenvalue exceeding one were extracted via principal components analysis and were rotated via varimax rotation. Given that the final two items consisted of single items and since the eigenvalues of the last two factors fell precipitously from the previous seven factors, seven factors were retained (factors with eigenvalues exceeding 2). The first factor is comprised of 12 items (alpha = .936) and was named “positive internship experience.” The second factor is comprised of four items (alpha = .792) and was named “positive work environment.” The third factor is comprised of four items (alpha = .722) and was named “improved job prospects.” The fourth factor is comprised of five items (alpha = .835) and was named “new skills.” The fifth factor is comprised of three items (alpha = .685) and was named “comfort with work environment.” The sixth factor is comprised of three factors (alpha = .712) and was named “communication skills.” The seventh factor is comprised of three items. However, since its reliability was low (alpha = .540), it was also dropped from further consideration, leaving a total of six factors. The items comprising each factor are displayed on Table 1.

Table 1: Internship Experience Factor Items

Internship Experience Factors	Factor Items
Factor 1: Positive Internship Experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I really did something worthwhile in my internship. 2. Overall, I would rate my internship experience excellent. 3. I was satisfied with the work assignments I had during my internship. 4. My internship was very interesting. 5. My internship work was satisfying. 6. Projects were beneficial to goal of enhancing overall marketing knowledge. 7. Based on responsibilities I would recommend employer to other students. 8. Right amount of one-on-one time with my manager to review activity. 9. Assigned internship work responsibilities were well defined. 10. The work I did was challenging and stimulating. 11. Learned more from my internship than from guest speakers in class. 12. Felt comfortable talking to supervisor regarding problems encountered
Factor 2: Positive Work Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I was well received by my co-workers at the beginning of the internship. 2. I received respect from co-workers while interning. 3. I was treated on the same professional level as the other employees. 4. I now feel more comfortable working with different types of people.
Factor 3: Improved Job Prospects	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students who have done internships are more likely to get job offers. 2. Feel internships are an effective strategy for gaining employment. 3. I now feel more confident in finding a job upon graduation. 4. Students who have done internships are more likely to have higher starting salary.
Factor 4: New Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My internship experience improved my networking skills. 2. I feel my personal interests and career ambitions are more defined. 3. My internship work was valuable. 4. I developed new skills and knowledge as a result of the internship. 5. This experience helped me clarify my career goals.
Factor 5: Comfort with Work Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Application process and interview improved my level of comfort with the employer. 2. I feel that my internship experience gave me a realistic preview of my field. 3. I was satisfied with my interactions with my supervisor.
Factor 6: Communication Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My internship experience improved my oral communication skills. 2. My internship experience improved my written communication skills. 3. My internship experience improved my leadership/teamwork skills.

This Table shows factors from the factor analysis of thirty-nine items. A factor analysis of student responses identified six internship experience factors. Each of the factors is identified in this table, along with a title.

Similar to Paulins (2008), satisfaction with internship was measured by a single item. Students’ perceptions of their job prospects were measured by three single-item measures: students’ confidence in their ability to obtain a full-time position, perceived likelihood of obtaining a position with the interning company, and perceived importance of internship to future career success.

Finally, the duration of internship experience, hours per week worked as an intern, the level of compensation received, and GPA were also each measured by single items.

RESULTS

Correlations between each of the internship experience factors and satisfaction with internship is displayed in Table 2. In each instance, a significant (at the .05 level) relationship was observed between the internship experience factor and students’ satisfaction with the internship. Hence, support for Hypothesis 1 is observed – students with internships which provided positive experiences and for which they perceive greater personal benefits expressed higher satisfaction with their internships. Visual observation, however, seems to indicate that the relationships involving the internship experience factors are not equal in strength. Consequently, the relative strengths of the relationships between satisfaction with the internship and each of the internship experience factors were examined.

Table 2: Correlations between Internship Experience Factors and Satisfaction with Internship

Internship Experience Factor	Correlation with Satisfaction with Internship	Significance
Factor 1: Positive Internship Experience	.839	.000***
Factor 2: Positive Work Environment	.422	.000***
Factor 3: Improved Job Prospects	.290	.008***
Factor 4: New Skills	.525	.000***
Factor 5: Comfort with Work Environment	.475	.000***
Factor 6: Communication Skills	.282	.009***

*This table shows the correlations between each internship experience factor and the satisfaction students perceived they receive from participating in an internship. The first figure in each cell is the correlation coefficient. The second figure in each cell is the significance level. *** indicates significance at the 1 percent level.*

Several methods have been employed to compare correlation coefficients between a dependent variable and a set of independent variables. Although Hotelling’s t-test (Hotelling, 1940) is still considered the standard test for this form of analysis (Meng, Rosenthal & Rubin, 1992), the technique’s deficiencies have been clearly identified (e.g., Meng, Rosenthal & Rubin, 1992; Steiger, 1980; Williams, 1959). Instead, Meng, Rosenthal, and Rubin (1992), Neill and Dunn (1975) and Steiger (1980) have demonstrated the superiority of Dunn and Clark’s (1969) Fisher z transformation. The results using a Fisher z transformation to test differences between the correlations are displayed in Table 3. The results indicate that factor 1 (positive internship experience) is significantly (at the .05 level) more strongly related to internship satisfaction than the other five factors. Furthermore, the results indicate that factor 6 (communication skills) is significantly (at the .05 level) less strongly related to internship satisfaction than factor 4 (new skills) or factor 5 (comfort with work environment). Lastly surprisingly, factor 3 (improved job prospects) is significantly (at the .05 level) less strongly less strongly related to internship satisfaction than factor 4 (new skills) and is marginally significantly (at the .1 level) less strongly related to internship satisfaction than factor 5 (comfort with work environment).

Table 3: Comparing Correlation Coefficients

Internship Experience Factor	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
Factor 1: Positive Internship Experience	---					
Factor 2: Positive Work Environment	7.1833***	---				
Factor 3: Improved Job Prospects	8.275***	1.226	---			
Factor 4: New Skills	6.518***	-1.120	-2.535**	--		
Factor 5: Comfort with Work Environment	7.733***	-.607	-1.626	.590	---	
Factor 6: Communication Skills	11.210***	1.176	.023	2.813***	1.806*	---

*This table shows the relative strengths of the relationships between students’ satisfaction with an internship and each of the internship experience factors. Each of the cells reports the results using Fisher z transformation. ***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels respectively.*

Correlations between students’ confidence in their ability to obtain a full-time position, likelihood of obtaining a position with the interning company, and the perceived importance of internships to future career success and satisfaction with internship are displayed in Table 4. Significant (at the .05 level) findings were observed for the relationships involving students’ confidence in their ability to obtain a full-time position and the perceived importance of internships to future career success. A marginally significant (at the .1 level) relationship was observed for likelihood of obtaining a position with the interning company. The direction of each relationship was in the direction hypothesized. Hence, support was observed for Hypothesis 2 – students who perceived that their job prospects are improved as a result of their internship were observed to be more satisfied with their internship.

Table 4: Correlations between Employment-Related Perceptions and Satisfaction with Internship

Employment-Related Perceptions	Correlation with Satisfaction with Internship	Significance
Confidence in ability to obtain a full-time position	.259	.015**
Perceived likelihood of obtaining a position with the interning company	.199	.066*
Perceived importance of internship to future career success	.281	.010***

*This table shows the correlations between students' employment-related perceptions and their satisfaction with internship. The first figure in each cell is the correlation coefficient. The second figure in each cell is the significance level. ***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels respectively.*

Correlations between duration of internship experience, hours per week worked as an intern, the level of compensation received, and GPA and satisfaction with internship are displayed in Table 5. No significant (at the .05 level) relationships were observed. Hypothesis 3, therefore, was supported.

Table 5: Correlations between Internship Characteristics and Satisfaction with Internship

Internship Characteristics	Correlation with Satisfaction with Internship	Significance
Duration of internship experience	.104	.341
Hours per week worked as an intern	.006	.952
Compensation received	.103	.413
GPA	-.048	.661

This table shows the correlations between characteristics of the internships (and students' GPA) and satisfaction with internship. The first figure in each cell is the correlation coefficient. The second figure in each cell is the significance level. In no instance is a significant correlation observed.

DISCUSSION

Evidence was observed supporting each of the study's hypotheses. Students' satisfaction with their internships, for instance, was found to be related to nature of the internship experience and the benefits received. This is logical since one would expect that students' satisfaction with their internships should be affected by the qualities of the internship. This study, however, appears to indicate that students' assessment of their internships is not unidimensional, but instead arises from several factors.

Although each of the factors was observed to be related to internship satisfaction, the strengths of the relationships were not equal. Clearly, the relationship between positive internship experience (factor 1) and internship satisfaction was stronger than any of the other factors. This suggests that the qualities of the internship itself seem to be the primary issue in students' assessments of the success of an internship. Hence, internship coordinators should be concerned with the activities in which students will be engaged in potential internship positions to ascertain that the experience will include challenging, interesting work with well-defined work responsibilities.

It was interesting that the relationship between communication skills (factor 6) and internship satisfaction was found to be weaker than between comfort with the work environment (factor 5) and new skills (factor 4). There are a couple of possible explanations for this finding. First, students may not perceive that the communication skills gained from their internships was as valuable as other skills which they gained from their experiences. A possible alternative explanation is that students experienced more trials and problems in the area of communication which lowered their satisfaction with their internship. Additional research is needed to more fully illuminate this issue.

Finally, it was surprising to see that improved job prospects (factor 3) were not as strongly related to internship satisfaction than the internship experience, new skills acquired, or comfort with the work environment. This finding suggests that satisfaction with the internship is not synonymous with improved

job opportunities nor is future employment the primary concern. Internship coordinators and faculty members should be pleased that students' satisfaction with their internships seems to be more strongly related to the skills gained than to job prospects. Although job prospects are commonly a primary issue which is stressed as a reason to pursue an internship, the fact that the satisfaction students gain from an internship appears to be more strongly related to skills gained, the acquisition of new skills should also be stressed when attempting to market internships to students.

The finding that students' satisfaction with their internships was related to the internship's perceived ability to help them more readily obtain employment and to the degree of success they perceive they will enjoy in their future career reinforces the employment-related attractiveness of internships to students. To maintain or improve the attractiveness of internships to students, therefore, faculty internship coordinators need to ensure that the internship experiences available to students provide them with experiences which will equip them to compete in the job market. Doing so will provide students with opportunities for increased satisfaction with their internships and provide improved word-of-mouth to other students.

Interestingly, the amount of time students spent on their internships (total and per week) and the compensation received were not found to be related to internship satisfaction. When students are contemplating whether to pursue an internship, the time commitment involved and the compensation to be received tend to be primary considerations. It appears, therefore, that students who are contemplating pursuing an internship need to be educated that time commitment and compensation may not be the best criteria to use as they consider whether to pursue an internship or when assessing internship possibilities. Information to this effect shared by students who have previously participated in an internship may be beneficial. Such information shared by students who have completed an internship may be more likely to be taken seriously by students considering an internship than it would be if it was shared by a faculty member – faculty members are expected to make comments concerning focusing on the long-term effects of internships (e.g., ability to aid one's career) while downplaying the short term (e.g., level of pay and degree of work required). Information from students to this effect, however, can be expected to have a larger effect on affecting students' choices.

Finally, since student's GPA was not observed to relate to the satisfaction that they received from an internship, students' GPA does not seem to be a factor in the satisfaction perceived. Hence, a lower GPA may not restrict students from benefiting from participating in an internship. No evidence was noted (from the students' viewpoint) which would suggest that relatively poorer academic performance restrains students from benefiting from an internship to the same extent than students with superior academic performance.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the paper was to extend knowledge of internships in marketing by identifying the factors associated with higher student satisfaction with the internship experience. A sample of 88 business students responded to a scale consisting of 39 scale items developed to assess the experience and the benefits students receive from participating in internships. Factor analysis identified six factors. Each of the factors was observed to be significantly correlated with students' satisfaction with an internship. Correlational analysis also indicated positive relationships between students' satisfaction with their internship and their confidence in their ability to obtain a full-time position and the perceived importance of internships to future career success. A marginally significant relationship was observed for likelihood of obtaining a position with the interning company. Finally, no significant relationships were observed between duration of internship experience, hours per week worked as an intern, the level of compensation received, and GPA and satisfaction with internship.

The study possesses several limitations which may limit the generalizability of the results. The limitations of the study include a small sample (the sample was gathered from students attending colleges and universities located within a single state) and no attempt was made to control for differences in the nature of the internships. Although the sample was gathered from students attending several colleges and universities, they were all located within a single state. Furthermore, no attempt was made to control for differences in the nature of the internships. Future research should extend the analysis to include colleges and universities of different types and should control for different types of internship experiences. Furthermore, the analysis can be expanded to examine other disciplines, such as engineering.

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BIOGRAPHY

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