

## **DO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CLASS PROJECTS BETTER PREPARE STUDENTS FOR INTERNSHIPS?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

While internships have existed for over a century (Henry, Razzouk, & Hoverland, 1988), their prevalence in the business undergraduate experience has only become substantive in the past 10-15 years, with 75 percent of all college students now completing internships (Coco, 2000). Scott (1992) demonstrated that students not only saw an internship as a complement to coursework, but as a marketing tool to find work after college, a finding further supported by Cannon and Arnold (1998). Gault, Reddington, and Schlager (2000) extended this by learning that college students who did complete an internship during their academic career typically found professional employment sooner than those who had not completed an internship. Cook, Parker and Pettijohn's (2004) research furthered this through their 10-year longitudinal study showing that students' perceived value of their internships were sustained over an extended period.

Students are not the only ones who realize internships are valuable assets in their college experience. Knemeyer and Murphy's (2001) work found that 95 percent of surveyed managers held that internships not only improved the student's skills but that 87 percent found it helped students improve their problem solving skills as well. Later, Barr and McNeilly (2002) found that 40 percent of the responding Fortune 500 recruiters believed that soft skills such as leadership and teamwork could be enhanced in an internship or other extracurricular experiences.

The current study was conducted at a mountain states, urban college. The marketing program has a strong focus on experiential learning and internships. This focus has been developed over many years due to the strong support the professors have for the experiential educational literature. Experiential

learning exercises at this college are usually centered on local businesses thus helping the college fulfill its "Urban Land Grant" Mission. It is the assumption (and promotional hook of the college) that these class activities prepare students for internships and jobs. This study was designed to research this assumption.

A survey was conducted with all marketing student interns during the 2007-08 academic year. A sample of 59 surveys was gathered. The Likert-based survey examined how students evaluated their experiences in their recent internships on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) in terms of general benefits, skills that were enhanced and career preparation that was facilitated as a result of completing the internship. The survey also queried how the internship experiences reinforced the marketing content students had learned over the course of their studies. By using the four sets of questions listed above, the purpose of the study was to determine if experiential projects in a classroom setting led to more positive internship experiences.

From the results it is apparent that student interns who completed an experiential learning exercise prior to their internship had a more enjoyable internship experience. They were also more comfortable in working with clients and had the confidence and desire to show their work products to future employers. Maturity and belief in their abilities were more advanced with those students that had a client based experiential learning exercise prior to obtaining an internship. Based on these results it might be beneficial for students to complete more course work and specifically those with an experiential learning component before they consider an internship.

**References Available on Request**