EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION RECRUITMENT VALUE: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF LARGE AND SMALL COMPANIES

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to evaluate employer perceptions regarding the value of internships and to determine the role of company size in internship recruitment and/or placement for undergraduate and graduate students in the United States. The study provides a much-needed employer viewpoint of the role of experiential education in undergraduate and graduate education, as well as offering researchers valuable insight into the needs and hiring practices of employers.
The job market is ever-changing. The study can offer insight into the role company size plays in regard to internship placement opportunities. It will also help determine if there is a need for colleges and universities to consider aligning their academic curriculums to fit the needs of employers in regard to experiential education preferences.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Three questions guided this study:

1. Is there a relationship between company size and internship value in recruitment and/or placement?
2. Is there a relationship between company size and the value of internships in recruitment and/or placement opportunities for full-time hiring?
3. Is there a relationship between company size and value placed on prior experience if the internship was an unpaid internship?

**HYPOTHESES FOR GUIDING QUESTIONS**

**Research Question 1:**

Is there a relationship between company size and internship value in recruitment and/or placement?

- **Null hypothesis.** There is no correlation between company size and value placed on internships in recruitment and/or placement.
- **Alternative hypothesis.** There is a correlation between company size and value placed on internships in recruitment and/or placement.
HYPOTHESES FOR GUIDING QUESTIONS

Research Question 2:
Is there a relationship between company size and the value of internships in recruitment and/or placement opportunities for full-time hiring?

Null hypothesis. There is no correlation of enhanced value of internships in recruitment and/or placement opportunities for full-time hiring based on company size.

Alternative hypothesis. There is a correlation of enhanced value of internships in recruitment and/or placement opportunities for full-time hiring based on company size.

Research Question 3:
Is there a relationship between company size and value placed on prior experience if the internship was an unpaid internship?

Null hypothesis. There is no correlation that the value of prior internship experience if the internship was an unpaid internship based on company size.

Alternative hypothesis. There is a correlation that indicates that the value of prior internship experience if the internships were unpaid internships based on company size.

LIMITATIONS

1. There was no prior knowledge of how many of the 3,100 NACE employer members were in a position to make hiring/recruitment decisions.
2. There was no prior knowledge of how many of the 3,100 NACE employer members offer internships or co-ops.
3. There was no prior knowledge of how many companies had a grade point average requirement for recruitment/placement.
4. Companies who indicated that they offer on-the-job training and experiential education opportunities are not necessary to be considered for placement.
DELIMITATIONS

1. Respondents had to be in a role of decision making in terms of hiring or recruitment of personnel.
2. Respondents had to offer an internship or co-op program which could be paid or unpaid.
3. The study did not suggest that experiential education opportunities are the only way to be gainfully employed after graduation.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. All participants surveyed would have an internship or co-op program offered with their company.
2. Employers understand that experiential education opportunities are that of internships or co-ops.
3. Employers responding to the survey represent a small or large company size organization as defined by the research definitions.
4. The participants are recruiters and/or human resources professionals with authority to make recommendations for hire.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential Education Defined
- Experiential Learning describes learning that allows an individual to gain hands-on work experience in their field of study.
- Based on Grounded Theory
  - John Dewey's Conceptual Framework Theory (1938)
LITERATURE REVIEW

Past research studies have suggested experiential education is a key component in hiring, gaining hands-on experience, and even increased (or enhanced) academic performance. Job opportunities for students have grown due to experiential learning opportunities such as internships and co-ops. Experiential education opportunities assist students in the job search process, increase their grade point averages (GPA), allow them to determine if they are in a career that best suits them, and allow them to gain hands-on work experience within their field of study (Knouse, Tanner, & Harris, 1999; Walker, 2011).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trends after 2008 Economic Slowdown

Economic Downturn Forces Change in Employer Needs

Housing, Credit, and Financial Lending Institutions Lead to Market Recession

Employers tighten their purse strings and look for ways to cut costs

Internships/Co-ops emerge as viable option to reduce costs

LITERATURE REVIEW

Value of Experiential Learning

Internships offer graduates the opportunity to gain hands-on skills such as critical thinking, teamwork, and time management.

The result is transferable skills which radiate back to the classroom, thereby increasing employment opportunities (Knouse, 1999; Vucinic, 1998; Peffier, 2012).

Employer Benefits

Student Benefits
STUDY SAMPLE
- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)
  - Employer database:
  - 3,000 active primary employer members
  - 264 responses (8.6 percent response rate)
  - Large and small sized company members in the United States
- Members recruit regionally, nationally, and/or internationally
- Convenience sample was used due to lack of sorting ability from the organization. Primary employers members were all given opportunity to respond.

DATA COLLECTION
- Questionnaires were used for the study.
- Questions were generated by the researcher.
- A pilot study was conducted to establish questionnaire validity and reliability.
- Career Professionals and Institutional Research Personnel were used to review the questionnaire after the pilot study as were employers and college personnel at the Southern Association of Colleges and Employers Annual Conference to establish face and construct validity.

DATA ANALYSIS
- SPSS Software was used in the data analysis.
- Descriptive and Inferential Statistics were used to describe data.
- With the ordinal data collected, Spearman Rho determined the correlational coefficient—used because it measures ordinal data.
- The correlational coefficient will determine if there is a correlation between company size and value of internship experience in recruitment/ placement from -1 to +1.
RESULTS FOR FULL STUDY

The recommended sample for 3,100 population with a confidence level of 95 percent was n = 342 which would provide a confidence interval of 5.77; the study was short by 78 to reach the power analysis.

The survey was opened January 6 and closed January 26, 2016. NACE emailed 3,100 employer members; n = 264 or approximately 8.51 percent response rate.

RESULTS—COMPANY SIZE RESPONDENTS

RESULTS—GUIDING QUESTION ONE

There is no correlation between the value that companies place on internships and them being a perquisite for hiring; r^2 = -.113, p = .067. The p value of .067 is larger than the alpha value of .05, which indicated that it is not statistically significant. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted for question number one.

There is no correlation between company size and value placed on internships in recruitment and/or placement.
RESULTS—GUIDING QUESTION TWO

When analyzing guiding question two, employers were asked how they consider internships/co-ops for hiring for full-time positions, again there was a small correlation between value placed on internships as a prerequisite for hiring full-time at $r^2 = .149$ and a $p = .015$ value which was significant because it is smaller than the alpha 0.05.

Thus the null was rejected; there is a correlation of enhanced value of internships in recruitment and/or placement opportunities for full-time hiring based on company size.

RESULTS—GUIDING QUESTION THREE

Employers were asked, "Do you consider candidates that have had an unpaid internship experience as you do those with paid internship experiences when considering an applicant for recruitment and/or placement (see Table 4)?"

The $p$-value = .749 which indicated a significance greater than the alpha 0.05 the with a spearman rank coefficient of $r_s = .02$ close to zero but still no correlation.

Because the $p$-value was larger, it failed to reject the null. Thus, the null was accepted there is no correlation that the value of prior internship experience decreases if the internships were non-paid internships.
RESULTS—ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS RELATED TO HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUMS

Should colleges and universities offer an academic credit option for all students, regardless of their major, if they wanted to participate in an internship/co-op experience?

64.77 percent of employers indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed to student's having the option for academic credit for their experience.

This question was important in determining how employers perceived the importance of the student being able to receive academic credit for their experience gained in the workplace through a co-op or internship experience.

RESULTS—ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS RELATED TO HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUMS

Would you recommend colleges and universities consider requiring an internship/co-op experience as a part of a graduation requirement for all students, regardless of their major?

With a mean score of 3.87 on a scale of 5.0, a majority of employers, 70.85 percent of employers indicated colleges and universities should consider requiring an internship/co-op as a part of the requirements for graduation.

Thus, suggesting internship/co-ops are something that should be recommended to colleges and universities as a part of a graduation requirement according to a majority of employers.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are opportunities for expansion of this study.

The addition of focus group interviews from employers would have further strengthened the research.

The focus group interviews could have been utilized to explore percentages of students hired for internship/co-op and pay issues attendant to previous new hire experience.

The study demographic could have focused on what part of the country each respondent represented.

In efforts to keep the number of questions on the questionnaire low, a number of demographic questions were omitted.
FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Using an organization that allowed follow up emails could also help with the response rate issues.
- One question addressed factors that impact recruitment and hiring decisions; this question could be explored further through chi square analysis to explain that other factors impact the recruitment/placement process.

SUMMARY

- Experiential education is valuable as indicated by this study. The bigger picture that emerged was that internships are a component that employers desire regardless of company size and sector of value.
- Not only is experiential learning necessary, they are strongly encouraged by employers.
- The research will help other educational researchers, career advisors, and students determine if company size is an important consideration when looking for experiential education opportunities.

REFERENCES-ABBREVIATED LISTING

REFERENCES (CONT.)


