

INFORMATION SYSTEMS INTERNSHIPS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO FUNDING, RESEARCH, CONSULTING, RECRUITMENT, AND ECONOMIC OUTREACH

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ABSTRACT

Most Information System programs have suffered from a dearth of students in recent years. This is in contrast to enrollments in 2003 when enrollments were at an all-time high. Today reputation, prestige, and simply knowing IS programs, exist is more important than ever. One method to reach new students as well as new funding sources, research and service opportunities, and help local economic development, is through Internship programs. Studies have listed the benefits students and employers reap from participating in and supporting internship programs. But what are the benefits Information Systems programs receive from supporting internship programs? The responses of 180 colleges of business deans suggest Information Systems programs which require all students to have internships, more frequently participate in economic development activities and develop a greater connection to the community, their classroom discussions are richer, they more receive external funding, find new research opportunities, and their student interns are being hired sooner by the best organizations into better positions with higher, salaries than students without internships and the department reputation is enhanced.

INTRODUCTION

Studies have been conducted on the benefits business students have received from internship opportunities (Lahm, 2006, Gault et. Al, 2000, Cannon et. al., 1998, Anonymous, 1994, Peace, 1992, Schmutte, 1985), but none have focused on Information System programs.

What are the benefits of student internships to IS programs? The three major categories that are mentioned in the mission statement of most colleges and universities are teaching, research and service, through not always in that order. Are IS programs receiving benefits in these or other areas from student internships? Do internships affect external funding, reputation, or recruiting?

Internship programs have been around since 1906, but few colleges of business require them for all students. Only 6% of the 180 schools responding to this survey require internship experience as a condition of graduation for all students. The percentage required by IS programs is much higher at 16.3%. Eighty of the 180 responding schools have IS programs and 26 require internships as a condition for graduation.

Internships come in various forms and are called by a variety of names; externships, co-ops, practicum, etc. Typically, an intern is someone working in a temporary position with an emphasis on education rather than employment. An internship is similar in several respects to an apprenticeship. Cooperative education Departments are usually more structured than internships and combines academic education with practical work experience. The term internship will be used to describe all work-base education experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research on IS internship programs is scarce. A quarter page in the June 9, 2008 issue of *Computerworld* discussed an internship for those wanting to promote entrepreneurship and vegetarianism. Three informational articles were written in 2007 about business internships. They were very brief, a total of only ten pages in length, four pages of which were photographs. Sandvig, et al. is the only IS article addressing internships in 2007. They found "internship experience is the single most influential factor for predicting starting salary for IS graduates" (2007, p 616). Further, they found internship experience increase starting salaries by 10.4% and they reduced the time it took for students to land that first job.

Beckett in March of 2006 wrote a three-page article in *People Management* discussing internship issues for human resource departments in the United Kingdom. The spring 2006 issue of the *Baylor Business Review* had two articles touting the ways marketing internships benefit their students. Only one quarter of a page in the last three years out of the hundreds of thousands pages written in business journals was devoted to IS internships.

Research has shown three main groups benefit from internships: students, employers and educational institutions. Many studies have found benefits to student interns: Higher starting salaries for graduates, (Gault, et al., 2008, Sandvig, et al., 2007, Malcolm, 2000, & Taylor, 1988), higher job satisfaction later in employment (Gault, et al., 2000, Devine, et al., 2007 & Taylor, 1988), more job offers that come sooner (Gault, et al., 2008, Sandvig, et al., 2007, Taylor, 1988, & Thiel and Hartley, 1997), more job offers (Devine, et al., 2007, Malcolm, 2000), better extrinsic success (Gault, et al., 2008, & Taylor, 1988), development of communication skills (Knemeyer and Murphy, 2002), better career preparation (Gault, et al., 2008), improved job-related skills (Devine, et al., 2007, Knemeyer and Murphy, 2002), improved creative thinking (Gault, et al., 2008), better job interviewing skills (Gault, et al., 2008), better job networking (Gault, et al., 2008), stronger resumes (Devine, et al., 2007, Malcolm, 2000), more money earned as a student (Knemeyer and Murphy, 2002), and academic credit earned for internship work (Knemeyer and Murphy, 2002).

Employer benefits include: first choice of the best students (Gault, et. al, 2008, Malcolm, 2000 & Thiel and Hartley, 1997), best selection of future employees (Devine, et. al, 2007, Malcolm, 2000, & Hall, et. al, 1995), greater likelihood of employer/employee satisfaction (NACE, 2005, Knemeyer and Murphy, 2002, Malcolm, 2000, & Thiel and Hartley, 1997), fresh, valuable ideas from newly-educated interns (Knemeyer and Murphy, 2002, Thiel and Hartley, 1997), a solid networking relationship with the college (Thiel and Hartley, 1997), an opportunity to fulfill social responsibilities by reaching out to students (Thiel and Hartley, 1997), and a valuable source of affordable part-time help (Devine, et. al, 2007, Knemeyer and Murphy, 2002, & Malcolm, 2000)

Suggested benefits to IS programs include: an improved reputation (Devine, et. al, 2007, Thiel and Hartley, 1997), improved student recruiting efforts (Devine, et. al, 2007), the ability to attract smarter students (Gault, et. al, 2008 & Thiel and Hartley, 1997), new scholarships and other forms of funding (Gault, et. al, 2008 & Thiel and Hartley, 1997), networking within the local community (Gault, et. al, 2008 Devine, et. al, 2007, & Thiel and Hartley, 1997), external curriculum assessment (Devine, et. al, 2007, Thiel and Hartley, 1997), and valuable practitioner input (Thiel and Hartley, 1997).

A few negative aspects of internship programs include students not taking their internship seriously and extensive faculty time spent advising interns (Krohn, 1986) and one study indicated internship program administrators are under-appreciated and not adequately compensated for their efforts (English and Lewison 1979).

HYPOTHESES

The research topics previously discussed were used to develop the following hypothesis. Based on previous research, these hypotheses are stated in positive terms. It is expected that benefits will come to IS programs that require student internships.

- H1: IS programs with internship programs are capturing the teaching benefits.*
- H2: IS programs with internship programs are acquiring the research.*
- H3: IS programs with internship programs are providing service.*
- H4: IS programs with internship programs are helping with economic development.*
- H5: IS programs with internship programs are receiving financial rewards for offering student internship programs.*
- H6: IS programs are using student internship programs for recruiting.*
- H7: IS programs are using their student internship programs to enhance their reputation.*

Each hypothesis is stated in the positive statement, as suggested in prior research, benefits in all areas are expected to be found.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Internships are underappreciated for the role they play in business schools. While 95% of the institutions responding to the survey in this research offer some form of internships, it seems only a small percentage are cultivating the rewards that could be available to them. Internships are a source of additional students in times of shrinking enrollment, for example. Internships enhance the reputation of schools. They can also be a channel for much needed funds for research. Internships can provide faculty with new business experience through service and consulting opportunities as well.

Few IS programs are receiving these benefits. It is evident that opportunities exist for departments to reap the rewards from internship programs.

More research must be conducted to enhance our knowledge of these relationships and the benefits student internships offer.

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