

The Value of Internships in Global Workforce Development

Mergleda Hodo¹

Abstract

Internship is a vital role to develop knowledge, skill and to establish clear connection between their academic studies and the business world. The internship opportunities help student to gain experience by introducing with different ways of working and preparing them to be successful as member of the global workforce.

The survey aims to analyze the internship of undergraduate and graduate student in Epoka University and determine the factors for the valuable internship experience. It shows the statistical analysis for the student's profile, the structure of internship and the value of the internship to student career plans. Also this study researches the outcomes of internship students to establish an opinion about their experiences valuable for a career in the 21st Century globalized marketplace.

Key terms: internships, work experience, career

JEL classification: I21, J24

Introduction

Internships are known as work- based educational experiences giving students the opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills that relate to perform better at specific jobs in real world environment. Also increase the chance to gain full time employment after graduation. According to Tackett *et al* (2001), internships have taken on an increasingly important role in education over the past decade since they present students with many advantages, ranging from gaining experience and obtaining career-related direction to networking with other students from various institutions as they at the organisation providing the internship (Lubbers, 2008).

Studies conduct on the benefits of internships for graduate and undergraduate students also suggest that those students prospect to be successful in the job market. Also internships are essential for university benefit's which use internships to evaluate their graduates and academic programs. Internships provide an outlet for students who desire to master the skills they will need and move quickly to professional practices of writing,

1. Mergleda Hodo, Research assistant in Department of Banking and Finance, Epoka University, mboda@epoka.edu.al

editing, and visual media (Cohen, 2001). Beard (2007) found post internship debriefings with students could impact curricular as well as teaching and learning strategies.

What we learn directly from their experiences can provide both educators and professionals valuable information assuring a learning environment that enhances the learning process. Internship is related directly to student's major by providing work experience, positions, occupations or professions all of them associated to their career interests. No matter if you are working for a small start-up or a Fortune 500 company, the essential point will be learning how to work with coworkers of all ages, communicate with a supervisor and function in a staff meeting.

Before the transition of country, students graduated with the assurance of securing a job by the government. But today students are faced with significant challenges in work environment due to the country's economic problems. Providing students with educational experiences give them an opportunity to apply knowledge, skills and experience cultural diversity through employment in another country.

This study presents the benefits and challenges faced by student interns at the Epoka University focused in Faculty of Economics and Administrative Science. The study engaged the use of the survey to solicit data from the 132 undergraduate and graduate students to understand the internship experience as seen through their eyes. The mission of Epoka University is to contribute to the development of society, to science and knowledge and work done in this field. It gives importance to the production of knowledge and technology for undergraduate and postgraduate programs in order to contribute in raising well-educated and productive young people. Epoka University through its graduate programs, education, international experiences and research tradition will raise scientists and fulfill the needs of the society.

This research investigates two additional questions. Did the internship provide students with the assurance of securing job? Did students perceive an increase in their knowledge and cultural skills based on their nation and international internships? The significance of this study is to provide that internship programs are effective and worthwhile for students. It is imperative for faculty, advisors, students and parents to be informed about the value of participating in internships.

Literature Review

Over the decades, there are many empirical researches on the effective implementation of the positive outcome of internships by comparing student's perceptions and benefits at the end of the internship (Taylor, 1988; Raymond, McNabb & Matthaei, 1993; Knouse, Tanner & Harris, 1999; Coco, 2000; Gault, Redington & Schlager, 2000; Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Merrit, 2005; Plunkett, 2007). Guided, effective, high-quality internships are increasingly being important for universities as they increasingly compete for excellent students and establish strong relationships with leading companies. One of the major proponents of experiential education was John Dewey. In the early 20th century Dewey advocated for learning experiences where students could employ the knowledge and skills they acquired in the classroom well beyond the confines of its four-walls (Dewey, 1916/1944). In the later part of the 20th century, David A. Kolb Fall 2009 stressed, along with Dewey, the need for experience to be organized and processed as a means to support learning.

Inskster and Ross (1998) define an internship as "a three-way partnership among

the educational institution, the student intern, and the organization where the interns take on the challenges of a program of systematic experiential learning.” Such programs bring together teachers, students, and professionals to maximize the learning experience (Alderman, 2007).

The student’s internships originated in the U.S in the early 1900s (Driscoll, 2006). The history of internships is intimately intertwined with that of experiential learning and education, school-to-work programs and initiatives, career academies and career-exploration programs and services learning programs (Michigan Center for Career & Technical Education, 1995).

Definition of Internships

According to Furco (1996) internships are defined as programmes engaging students in service activities primarily for the purpose of providing them with hands-on experience that enhances their learning or understanding of issues relevant to a particular area of study. On the other hand, McMahon and Quinn (1995) note that internships are supervised work experiences whereby students leave their institutions and get engaged in work related programmes, during which period they are closely supervised by experienced job incumbents

Internships can be described as non-contractual work that offers students some experience in the workplace. It takes place during their time at school for a couple of week or usually lasting up to a year during the university. Internships vary from the type of institution; some common characteristics include the following.

An internship.....

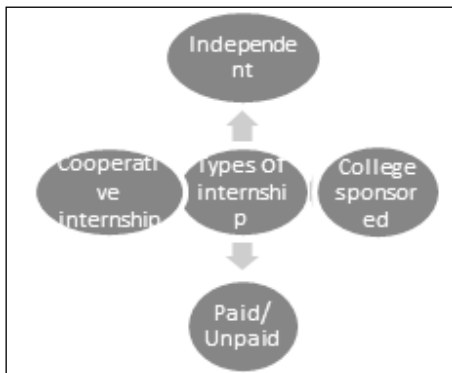
- 1- Includes “learning plan” that someone develops individually.
- 2- Promotes academic, career and/or personal development.
- 3- In general consist of learning objectives, observation, reflection, evaluation and assessment.
- 4- Set the stability of the intern’s learning goals with the specific work the organization needs completed.
- 5- The period of internships vary from two weeks to one year in duration; a typical internship lasts three months and occurs during the fall, spring or summer semesters.
- 6- May be part-time or full-time.
- 7- May be paid or non-paid.
- 8- May be part of an educational program and evaluated for academic credit.

In general internships are experiential *education opportunities* which bridge the gap between the academic and extra-curricular experiences of student life and the world of work.

Types of Internship Programs

According to the Employers’ Internship Toolkit (2005), internships are commonly used term in experiential education. Internships occur during different times of the year: summer, winter or spring but the most internship are during the summer. They can be paid or unpaid also may be part-time or full time.

Figure 1 Types of internship programs



Cooperative Internships

Cooperative internship involved paid positions and is available only to major's students. Usually, they are full time and they require two six- month assignments. Such programs interact and collaborate with tops professionals in their field which help students to create dynamic synergies of talent, experience, leadership, communications abilities and contribute ideas in the workforce.

Paid and Unpaid Internships

An internship may be paid, unpaid or partially paid. This is a decision of the employer when you do the internships. They vary from the type of companies, examples in professional fields such as medical, science, law, accounting and technology when students provide benefits to employers by their works most internship positions are paid. On the other hand, non-profit charities are most unpaid, they are as volunteer positions. When students are under unpaid internships, their work is as an integral part of the study course and will receive credit from that.

Independent and College Sponsored Internships

The majority of internships are arranged by the university but in some cases students and university work together for the placement. Most universities allow students to earn academic credits for internship's participating which make students to arrange their internship independent of schools. University has close relationships with various employers and gives to the students more opportunities for their pleasure professional fields.

International internships

A student internship can be used as a successful way to increase knowledge, skills, experiences and their competitiveness in the expanding global job market. Knights (1994, p. 6) recommendations for students include: participate in an international internship and a study abroad program, learn a foreign language, become involved in international programs on campus, and receive intercultural instruction. In addition, there has been research showing the importance of a student's knowledge of cultural diversity and global competency. Because of the changing global job market, it will be mandatory for students to have a deeper understanding of cultural differences, as well as, be open to the possibility of relocating to a foreign country or to work directly with employers or employees who live overseas (Knight, 1994).

According to the National Association of Employers, in the 2009 annual Job Outlook survey, (as cited by Gault, Leach & Duey, 2010) 76% percent of employers expressed the desire to hire students with job experience. This is great news for students, according to

Gault et al. (2010) because over 85% of employers reported in 2008, that they offer paid internships. In comparing 500 students, it was discovered that those who participated in internships were offered jobs, on the average, ten weeks earlier than those who had not worked in an internship. In addition, a follow-up was conducted with these students after several years and the results showed that the students with internship experience were earning 17% more than the others (Gault, et al., 2010).

The experience earned by foreign education and international internship is meaningful for the success of students. Also give the students more opportunity to work abroad and creates a unique resume. For Epoka University is critical to develop strong international internship programs since has six year performing in Albania. Even if , it has short time operating , Epoka establish programs to create an overseas experience., like exchange students program with other universities abroad and also international internships like in turkey, Germany, USA and overseas. Many of the students who participate in international internships need to purchase their own airplane tickets and small amount of money for their services for room and board.

Bald and Van de Walter (1998) conclude that the advantages for students to participate in international internships are immense. Not only can they provide students with learning experiences in their fields of interest, thus, providing them with valuable training and skills; an international internship will allow a student to live in a setting where global competency skills can be acquired. Students can improve their foreign language skills while they are immersed in a non-English speaking area. Learning about new cultures and traditions can help student's absorb a more global context of the world. In addition to these benefits, students can make valuable job contacts while working at an internship, which may augment their employment opportunities in the states or in an international setting (Bald & Van de Walter, 1998).

Methodology

The internship programs have been implemented by the career plan department in Epoka University. The workable goal for internship programs is to hands-on experience for students in a career, preparing students for post-secondary education. Epoka's mission emphasizes a preparation for a specific career field, or building skills for their students. One month before the spring term end, the students are responsible to feel the internship application form and then the career plan department is available to assist them. Also the career plan department helps them research, apply and prepare for an internship experience abroad. The majority of internships are arranged by the university but in some cases students work together with the faculty for the placement.

The goal of this research was to collect qualitative data on students who participated in internships and understand the nature of the internship experience through the perceptions of students. The research investigates two specific purposes. First, explore the possibility that the internship provide students with the assurance of securing job. Second, examines whether or not students perceive an increase in their knowledge and cultural skills based on their nation and international internships experience.

In this research study, data's were collected through a survey questionnaire for summer internships during 2011/2012. A survey was administered to 132 undergraduate and graduate students at Epoka University in Tirana. Approximately 75 % of the students were undergraduates and the others were graduate degree. Most of the graduate students

begun working full time after completes the internship program in different companies. For the participants in internship, the career plan department in university requires a report for the duties they have performed during the internship. Also the instructor require from the students to submit a completed resume on their internship experience. According to the survey results students found their internships experience valuable. The investigation will identify the factors which create the most effective experience.

Subject represented four different majors of FEAS in Epoka University:

- 1- Banking and Finance (n=80)
- 2- Business administration (n=18)
- 3- Economics (n=24)
- 4- Political science (n=10)

In the survey were asked question regarding the completion of internship, internship experience and future career goals. The purpose of this investigation is to bring meaning, structure and order to the collected data. The data's includes the student's profile, the structure of internship and the value of the internship to student career plans

Results and Discussion

The result of analysis indicates that the completion of an internship during the undergraduate studies is a useful strategy in helping to obtain a career-oriented position for after graduation. Internships are an established mechanism to enhance self- and environmental –awareness (Brooks *et al.*, 1995; Garavan and Murphy, 2001)

Table 1(in Appendix A) provides a student's profile including data on gender, major of study in school and GPA. The female student interns were slightly more than male student interns, accounting for 65% of the interns. The data of study major showed students in BAF were the main interns (60.6%), followed by which was the BUS (13.6%), PIR (18.2%) and ECO students (7.6%).

The older students benefit from internship due to their greater maturity and assist them in planning for their future workplace. Also the students with higher GPA's are more engaged in internship's so they can take a leading role in their own education and raise academic achievement. Table II and III provide the structure of internship. Most of the students received credit for their internship, this is applicable for the students in department of Banking and Finance in Epoka University but in other department is not applicable. Generally the period of internships decided due to the greater maturity from 2 weeks until one month. In a week student must have 36 hours of work and in most of the cases they were not paid for their work. Students were asked to rate their internship according to the performance and if they provided experiences that will be useful in obtaining a job in my field.

Table II (in Appendix A) shows data on the number of students who had completed an internship and indicate the post-graduate position. Of the 34 students who had completed an internship, 23 had secured a post-graduation position, while the other 11 had not. The majority of the students did their internship banks and communication firms. In terms of location 23.5 % of the interns choose to do their internship abroad like in Turkey.

Generally, internship periods ranged from two weeks to six months. Most students took internships in two weeks, accounting for 65.15% of. Only 25.75% of the interns joined internships between one to three months during the semester and 9.1% had been interned for three months or more. The longer internship period is provided for last year students in undergraduate studies which can learn more within a long period.

The last part, Career plans, measure the value of the internship to student career plans and how helpful the internship was in assisting them to make contacts with other professionals and find a job. In the appendix A are shown all relevant question. Many interns expressed their experience with broad declarations such as:

BAF student

Actually I have done 3 summer internships, more precisely in National Commercial Bank, Ministry of Interior, and Altelecom as well. All these internships helped me gain a more adequate knowledge on different fields. I believe that I have gained a very organized and adequate background during my academic preparation also during the internship which has been solidified into a concept that is now practical and applicable.

According to Knechel and Snowball (1987), internship is able to improve the academic performance of interns.

Conclusion

This study based on the benefits of internships for undergraduate and graduate students. It deals to the value of internship experience and how internships bring together different perspectives, knowledge, outlooks and opportunities for the professional world through collaboration and strategic partnership with companies.

The finding from this study evaluate the strength of the success factors of the internship effectiveness and gives voice to the students to occupy in internships which provide guidance to them in choosing career path. Internships provide an outlet for students to transition from academia to the post-graduation workforce. As many interns explained: "All the employers want to get knowledge about the interns and their portfolios and doesn't matter the grades.

From the above analysis, it can conclude that Epoka's internship program has been successful in meeting the objectives of exposing students to the culture and practices of the actual workplace. Also the international internship provides students with the desire to seek working abroad because of their time living and working in an international setting. Working abroad gives new career opportunities for students due to their increased confidence, networking, improved language skills, and their increased cultural competency. Finally, the power of internships is that they mould the university students into an effective manager."

References

- Beard F& Morton, L. (1999). Effects of internship predictors on successful field experience. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 53(4), 42-53.
- Basow, R. R., & Byrne, M. V. (1993). "Internship expectations and learning goals". *Journalism Educator*, 47(4), 48-56.
- Getz, J. (2002, August). *Journalism Students' Perceptions of the Value of Internships* A paper

presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Fontainebleau Hilton Resort and Towers, Miami Beach, FL.

- Zainal Ambri Bin Abdul Karim, Sumathi Renganathan, Chong Su Li, The Importance of Industrial Internship Programme in Engineering Education: Some Critical Success Factors, 2nd Regional Conference on Engineering Education, 3-5 December 2007.
- Narayanan, V. K., Olk, P., & Fukami, C. (2006, August). Determinants of internship effectiveness: An exploratory model. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Atlanta, GA.
- Gault, J., Redington, J., & Schlager, T. (2000). Undergraduate business interships and career success: Are they related? *Journal of Marketing Education*, 22(1), 45-53. Retrieved November 5, 2009, from ABI/INFORM Global. (Document ID: 52570405).
- Gault, J., Redington, J., & Schlager, T. (2000). Undergraduate business internships and career success: Are they related? *Journal of Marketing Education*, 22, 45-53.
- Taylor, M.S. (1998). Effects of college internship in individual participants. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 73, 393-492.
- Mihail, D.M., (2006). Internship at Greek Universities: An exploratory study. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 18, 28-41
- Maskooki, K., Rama, D.V., & Raghunanandan, K. (1998). Internships in undergraduate finance programs. *Financial Practice & Education*, 20, 94-102.
- Lam, T., Ching, L. (2006). An exploratory study of an internship program: The case of Hong Kong students. *Hospitality Management*, 26, 336-351.

Appendix A

Table I Demographics characteristics (n = 132)

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	46	35
Female	86	65
	132	100
Major of Study		
Banking and Finance	80	60.6
Business Administration	18	13.6
Political science	24	18.2
Economics	10	7.6
	132	100
Cumulative GPA		
2.0-2.49	24	18.2
2.50-2.99	30	22.7
3.00 – 3.49	36	27.3
3.50 – 4.00	42	31.8
	132	100

Table II Profile on completed internship and job at graduation (n=132)

Completed internship	Job at graduation		No job at graduation	
	N	%	N	%
Undergraduate students (n = 98)	-	-	-	-
Graduate students (n = 34)	23	67.6	11	32.4

Table III Profile on Business nature and the length of internship

Business nature of the companies		
Business Service	11	8.30
Tax Department	11	8.33
Education	6	4.55
Transport, Storage and Communication	16	12.12
Financial Institution	3	2.27
Government	2	0.02
Hospitality	4	3.03
Insurance	13	9.85
Bank	34	25.75
International internships		
Asya Bank (Turkey)	12	9.09
World vision (Turkey)	8	6.06
Ordu textile (Turkey)	6	4.55
Kurum (Turkey)	3	2.27
BKT (Kosovo)	5	3.79
Bank of Kosovo	2	0.02
	132	
Length of Internship		
2 weeks	86	65.15
1-3 months	34	25.75
3-6months	12	9.1

Table IV Measure the value of the internship to student career plans

Guiding questions	Responses
1- How do you think of internships?	Beneficial experience which bridges the gap between university and the workplace Important way to gain working experience Learning new skills Required to get a job after graduation
2- 3- What are your future career goals? Did this internship provide experiences that foster those career goals?	All these internships helped me gain a more adequate knowledge on different fields. My future career goal is to become a successful academician. To work in a financing or auditing department and to be a well-known and successful accountant. My future career goals are to be accounting. My goals are related mostly with leadership and management order
4- 5- Write down the most important 5 benefits of a successful internship	Gained knowledge of operation/norms of the workplace Enhanced communication, interpersonal and research skills Learned how to cope with difficulties Built up relationship with professionals and other interns/clients Became more sophisticated in career values
6- 7- 8- Did you gain an overview of the business through your internship? How?	Yes I did. Following the internship for 2 consecutive months and working there nearly 7 hours a day, from 8:30-15:00, gave me the opportunity to gain an overview of the bank. Yes. I met different people during my lunch hours and they help me understand how the company works. Yes, I gained by participating in different tasks of the business While working, I understood how tourism business works, how income is generated.
9- Did your Agency Supervisor provide a good combination of help, advice, and supervision, and at the same time allow you some freedom for working on your own? Explain.	Yes, he explained me all the information I needed and then I did all my assignment. In the end the supervisor checked my work. My supervisor showed a great care and interest concerning my performance in the bank and she showed the desire to help me whenever I had difficulties in understanding how operations were being done She advised me and at the same time she allowed me to perform some basic banking operations in my own, by proving me the freedom to work on my own. Yes, there they explained in details how a Bank works and also allowed me to perform any duty. Yes, all the time the supervisor was ready for help and advices
10- 11- What suggestions you have for interns or the organizations to enhance the internship effectiveness?	Internship program should be well planned, including a systematic training Job nature of the internship should be related to interns' study majors Organizations should hire interns only when it is going to provide learning opportunities Organizations should provide reasonable benefits for interns Job description should be clear enough for the interns to have to establish realistic expectations of the internship.