

# MARKETING INTERNSHIPS: EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS AND INTERNSHIP PROVIDERS

Scott R. Swanson, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, USA  
Chuck Tomkovick, University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, USA

## ABSTRACT

Internships are three-way partnerships between the educational institution, the student intern, and the company where the intern takes on the challenges of a program of systematic experiential learning. An intern is someone who is involved in a part-time or full-time work experience that is related to the student's career goal or major, who may be paid or unpaid, may or may not be receiving academic credit for the internship, but who is a temporary employee (Tovey 2001). The lack of relevant work experience and/or internships is a key complaint of employers, and a determining factor in employment decisions with one-third of firms in a recent study indicating that job candidates with an internship experience are *strongly* preferred over those lacking this credential (NACE 2007). Accordingly, as marketing educators continue to move to more experiential learning pedagogies, the internship has become more widely employed (Karns 2005). As such, it is important that the realities of the employment market are aligned strategically with marketing internship programs. Specifically, input from business organizations "can help ensure that the expectations of our off-campus partners are being met in ways that are both consistent with our academic missions and meaningful to future employers" (Sapp and Zhang 2009, p. 277).

For the student, completing an internship can result in improved job preparedness by acquiring relevant work experience, development of leadership and interpersonal skills (Beard and Morton 1999), and the establishment of networking opportunities. In addition to gaining experience via on-the-job learning of skills, internships can provide practical experiences that "can help students put a concrete experience to the abstract concepts they have been taught" (Tovey 2001, p. 230). The experience gained by working directly with professionals in their fields through an internship can also provide students with better awareness in making decisions about their education and vocational direction (Gault et al 2000). The result is that students who participate in internships make a quicker adjustment to the workplace from academia, and report higher starting salaries, higher levels of job satisfaction, and a shorter job search cycle (Gault et al 2000). Although internships yield numerous benefits, the degree to which the objectives and perceptions of marketing students and business organizations that provide internships align in an internship program may differ. A better understanding of student perspectives on internships in addition to the views of business can aid marketing educators in the development and evaluation of internship opportunities.

Opinions on the importance of internships providing a variety of critical worksite elements, student benefits, and provider benefits are being measured utilizing previously developed scales (Connon and Arnold 1998; Cook et al 2004; Henry et al 2001; Knemeyer and Murphy 2002). This study also identifies sources of information used by marketing students and internship providers when researching or promoting internship opportunities, respectively. Results are based on 421 completed questionnaires (n = 281 student marketing majors; n = 140 marketing internship providers). A better understanding of student and firm expectations and perceptions regarding marketing internships should help program coordinators and department chairs to improve both the processes and outcomes associated with internships.

References Available on Request.