

Hospitality Internships: An Employment Advantage or Perilous Experience

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ABSTRACT

Internships have been a major component from the beginning of hospitality education. Traditionally, internships are viewed as experiential learning or supervised work practice. In recent years, it is defined as a structured and career relevant supervised professional work/learning experience, paid or unpaid, within an approved hospitality agency/organization/corporation, under the direct supervision of at least one practicing hospitality professional and one faculty member for which a hospitality student can earn academic credit. Nowadays, internships are more seen as an element to pass in order to gain academic credit rather than an experiential learning that leads to a career. There are many factors and stakeholders involved that makes or breaks an internship experience of students. This paper endeavor to explore the factors from different stakeholders, and see the differences in internships output previously and currently.

KEYWORDS: Internships, Experiential Learning, Academic Credit, Hospitality, Programs.

INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have been written on the benefits of an internship program for students [10, 18, 23, 27]. Internships in any hospitality organizations provide a real sense of working and commitment towards fulfilling a particular jobs needs. As a result of that, interns are able to learn through experience and able to identify the problems and challenges related to their work without only confining towards theory of a certain body of knowledge. In addition, the capacity to learn is also widen through internships by encapsulating the real “zest” of the working atmosphere, challenges and problem solving through “live” action. However, the previous advantage of an internship nowadays is more seen as a perilous journey in order to complete a diploma or degree due to bad experience which faced by many interns that leads to their decision to not enter the industry as professionals upon graduation. Longer working hours, poor remuneration and promotional track, poor benefits and lack of rapport with colleges are identified as factors that lead to a student’s decision to not enter the industry [3, 26]. The value of an internship should be revisited and examined in order to see its function in recent years. A chronological literature is presented in order to evaluate the efficiency of an internship, and whether its function has increased or deteriorate over the years.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Internship” an excellent platform to maneuver the learnt skills, interests and plan career choices in real working environment while gaining an edge on “inexperienced” job market competition [23]. For some, it is “only” a requirement to complete their university study. Still others see internship as an opportunity to network, to learn new fields, or gain work experience [31]. As a result of that, internships are viewed as one of the prerequisite to gain academic certificates, rather than a valuable experience before entering the working world of hospitality.

The internship has a number of meanings. In [8] states that internship is a kind of experiential learning where students take the opportunity to apply learned theories from schools in the real world situation. It provides an opportunity for students to integrate and consolidate thinking and action. In [10] considered an internship as an opportunity to close the yawning gap between colleges learnt theory and practical reality. In [25] articulate that the internship is equivalent to fieldwork, filed experience, practicum, co-op or experimental learning with little variations. In [20] called internship as supervised work experience (SWE), which students are under special guidelines and attention during their internship instead of working alone by themselves in the industry.

Various research view internship programs from the perspective of students, schools and organizations. It is essential to update the internship programs and account for changed expectations. Accordingly, students see internship as a credible means to land that first job [5]. In [11] found that students view internships as a valuable learning experience for which they should receive academic credit, financial compensation and earn a grade. They also feel that internships are more valuable than case teaching that formal training should be at the beginning of

internships and direct supervision present throughout. Finally, students feel that internships may result in employment. Students without practical experience realize that they have a disadvantage when compared to those with internship experience. From the employer's perspective, it is a "golden opportunity to try before buying" students they might wish to recruit after graduation [6, 23].

As a result of that, universities and colleges places strong emphasizes in acquiring internship positions. Placement officers should encourage students to report information regarding their employers' internship programs. Further, companies involved in partnering with colleges, through philanthropy, contracts and special projects should be encouraged to use pools of former qualified interns to fill employment needs. Additionally, company consortia and industry groups should be encouraged to support internship programs and disseminate information on successful programs and interns. This constitutes good advertising for university and college programs [7].

This essential point is that internship offers excellent return to all parties involved (16), although, differences among them should never be taken lightly. In (8) critically relates the benefits of internships in a different manner, due to their different needs, expectations and beliefs. These differences seems to effect future careers in the industry from the earlier days of hospitality until now, and in [10] it was mentioned that a bad internship experience could demotivates a novice entering the industry, and eventually turning into other industry as a career path. In [33] has also highlighted any internship that does not fulfill student's needs of their career development would demotivates them from entering the industry. On a regular notes, internship are frequently referred as unstructured and poorly planned, thus leading to high complain regarding its content and quality [13]. The condition eventually leads to high fallout rates of graduates from the hospitality industry.

PROBLEMS RELATED TO INTERNSHIP

The nature of hospitality that demands long hours, high commitment and endurance may cause burnout even in the most motivated individual [26]. In addition to that, internship positions are "commonly structured tasks" which basically leads to boredom[3]. Internships usually does not come with benefits similar as the employees, which leads to unequal treatment while not providing any extra pay [20]. Although it is suggested by [14], that the nature of interaction and real work experience can be incorporated into class discussion, in [7], argued that the practicality of the knowledge is still a necessary element which could only be refined through practice.

Generally, students are unable to perform to the employer's expectations due to heavy workloads and inability to cope with the duties in the first place. In [12], pointed out that students are quite weak in problem solving since they feel burdened by the heavy workload and their own inexperience in handling the job. Another condition that enhances this condition is when the students fails to communicate and build good relationships with colleagues [20]. There are conditions whereby the employers are not well versed about the objectives of internships and may wrongly use the interns for their sole purposes. As stated by [10], many companies does not endeavour to nurture potential employees through internships. Instead, they prefer to take people base on their organizations needs and objective, which basically refers to their profit making ventures or cost saving initiatives. As a result, many companies does not possess a solid track of internship process, does not understand students needs in relation to their future career path and how to train them[12].

In terms of academic institutions, academic staff members are facing dilemmas in balancing their academic workload with internship arrangements. In [21], highlighted, internship representatives of any academic institutions are commonly their own academic staff who are involved with teaching and learning, while doing research as part of their work demand. At the same time, they are burdened with the workload aof informing, disseminating and making arrangements for internship programs for their students. These workload could basically leads to burnout and a compromise of the academican teaching quality, due to excessive administration workload from internship programs.

A number of studies have shown that negative internship experiences can reduce the students' desire to stay in the hospitality industry [2, 4, 29, 34, 35]. In [33] also commented that a program that fails to meet students' expectations would discourage them from entering the tourism and hospitality industry after graduation. In [13] similarly pointed out that many hospitality students, which through exposure to the subject and student work experience has become considerably less interested in selecting hospitality as their first career choice. In [28] concluded that many graduates of hospitality management programs leave the industry because of unfulfilled expectations. Despite the many negative comments about internship programs, some researchers firmly believe that a good internship program will retain more students, strengthen their passion and reduce their anxiety about the future [15]. In [7] surveyed senior students' internship experiences and pointed out that a successful internship implies a possibility of being hired by the same company after graduation, as interns are recruited by 62% of participating organizations. In [18] has proved that internship satisfaction influences student's confidence in their future career development. In [9] also proposed that serving an internship gives students a preview of an industry, reduces the likelihood of unmet expectations, yields career satisfaction and industry retention. In [32] has suggested that some students rely on internships as windows to their future careers, and they may decide to enter the hospitality industry based on the internship experience. In [30] also indicated that a structured internship may have a significant role in the subsequent performance of the interns and may lower turnover rates. Internship program

advisors are also important. They mentor intern students while serving as a bridge between students, schools, and employers to resolve any emerging issues [7, 19]. The above studies indicate that a good internship program may retain more students in the hospitality industry after graduation. The above literature indicates that a good internship experience may preserve more candidates in the hospitality industry upon graduation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The internships program’s results have not seen much change in recent years. The conditions of students undergoing the internship experience and decided not to enter the industry are still in high volume in many countries, which emphasizing hospitality and tourism education as part of their nation’s economic resources. The conditions of the university policy in relation to hospitality program development which includes internships has not seen any significant changes that could lead to increase the number of graduates going into the industry after essentially going through the internship experience and graduation. Rather, the internship experiences nowadays are seen “only” as a requirement to complete their university study. Still others see internship as an opportunity to network, to learn new fields or gain work experience [31]. However, the state of the matter is in relation to internships, it should be viewed as part of some hospitality academic programs rather than an optional element in any academic programs.

In discussing internships in recent years, only a few researchers have taken up the investigation further. An analysis by [17] in Turkey found that a substantial amount of students does not wish to work in the hospitality industry they study or have had their internship experience. In Table 1, significant proportions of tourism and hospitality students prefer to develop their career in subfields rather than they had their internship experiences.

Table 1: Future career intentions of tourism and hospitality students after the internship experience

Future Career Intentions	N (Total Population)	Percentage %
Other careers outside tourism and hospitality	110	18.3
Food & beverage (kitchen & Service)	112	18.6
Travel agencies	148	24.6
Administrative services	117	19.4
Front desk	87	14.5
Housekeeping	10	1.7
Entertainment	19	3.2
Total	603	100.0

The findings indicate students are confused about their careers as probably they have not been very well briefed and prepared for their internship experiences. Further findings of the study show that prior to their internship experiences only 20.2% of the students have either participated in a survey or have been interviewed at their universities about the sort of internship experience they may wish to have. Thus, they highlighted that student’s lack of understanding of the value of work experience, and a lack of drive and determination as suggested by [1].

A practical implication as suggested by [17] is that in developing any internship programs and in order for it to be successful, a higher level of cooperation among universities and hospitality establishments is a must. Efficient and effective feedback systems should be established within the internship programs so that corrections and improvements could be made. Academics and managers on hospitality programs should not be complacent for finding sufficient positions for their students to have their internship experiences and let their students be exploited by businesses. Policy makers in the government (e.g. Ministries of hospitality, education and employment) should participate in the design and implementation of internship programs, so that internship programs reach their real and intended objectives.

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