

Assessing the Impact of an Academic Internship Experience

Introduction

Hornsby and Johnson (1991) state that a "lack of practical work experience has long been a problem for college students when their credentials are reviewed during the job search process." Randall and Good (1991) assert that employers prefer to hire individuals who have work experience. Internships give students an opportunity to learn the mechanics of a job without having to work full-time in the position (Swift & Kent, 1999). As part of the undergraduate Extension Education curriculum, students at NC State are required to complete a semester long academic internship during their senior year. The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of the academic internship experience on the academic and personal development of former students in the Extension Education curriculum.

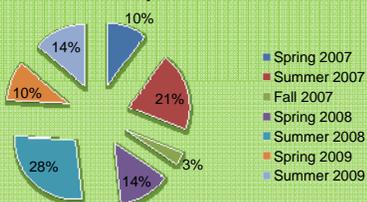


Materials and Methods

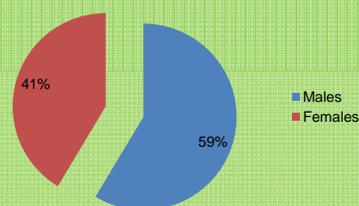
This was a descriptive survey research study. Extension education students who interned between the spring of 2007 and the summer of 2009 (N=40) were surveyed. Data were collected using an online survey instrument guided by procedures outlined in Dillman's Tailored Design Method (2000). Useable responses were received from 29 participants for a 72.50% response rate. Non-response error was controlled by comparing early to late responses and no statistical differences were found.

Results and Discussion

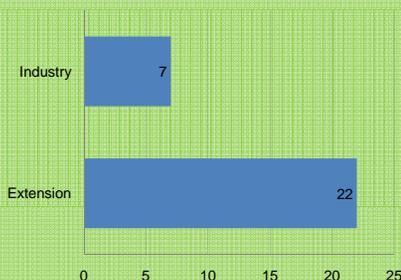
When Participants Interned



Gender of Participants



Type of Internship Completed



Pre- and Post-Personal and Professional Skill Level and Skill Change of Participants

Item	n	M ^a	SD	d ^b	t-value	df	Sig. ^c
Pre-Skill Level	29	3.36	.470				
Post-Skill Level	29	4.11	.476				
Skill Change	29	.753	.413	1.82	9.81	28	<.01

^a Scale: 1 = VERY LOW, 3 = MODERATE, 5 = VERY HIGH

^b Cohen's Measure of Effect Size (0.20 = Small, 0.50 = Medium, 0.80 = Large)

^c 2-tailed



Summary

1. Internships influence student's career choice and direction.
2. Supervisors (site and university) provided helpful advice, direction, and feedback, as well as helped to make the internship experience successful.
3. Internships are valued by students for both personal and professional development.
4. Internships develop student's personal and professional skills.
5. Overall, students felt prepared (academically) for their internship.
6. Overall, students were satisfied with their experience and recommended to the department to "keep doing what they're doing."

Recommendations

1. Investigate the development of an internship scholarship to help defray student's financial burden.
2. Work with internship sites to develop a list of potential housing for students.
3. Provide more preparation on working with volunteers and volunteer management.
4. Continue to periodically evaluate the internship program for program improvement and impact.