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Revisiting "Entering the Game at Halftime" Presentation

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Abstract
This paper reports a large-scale follow-up to a pilot study that examined ways that mass communication programs engage transfer students in internships and cocurricular activities. The author conducted a large-scale survey of students enrolled in programs listed in the AEJMC directory and also conducted interviews with some survey respondents. Results indicate differences between transfer and native students in key areas and offer suggestions for ways to improve experiences for both populations.

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Revisiting “Entering the Game at Half-time:”
An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

Abstract
This paper reports a large-scale follow-up to a pilot study that examined ways that mass communication programs engage transfer students in internships and co-curricular activities. The author conducted a large-scale survey of students enrolled in programs listed in the AEJMC directory and also conducted interviews with some survey respondents. Results indicate differences between transfer and native students in key areas and offer suggestions for ways to improve experiences for both populations.

Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

Introduction

“A degree is not enough, you guys. You have to do more.” So said the advisor for the campus newspaper when she came to visit my communications career seminar. The point of her visit, one of several during that class period, was to introduce the class to co-curricular activities in our department, so that students can begin to build their resumes and portfolios in preparation for doing internships before they graduated.

The sentiment that it takes more than a degree to get hired is echoed throughout higher education, and nowhere is hands-on experience more important than in mass communication programs. Students hoping to work as social media managers, television reporters or producers, public relations or advertising account coordinators, or hundreds of other entry-level jobs in the field need to have a portfolio of work to show to potential employers. Students can begin to build those portfolios through some of their classes, but experience in co-curricular activities gives students an edge when applying for internships, and those internships are often the biggest factor in helping a student get hired into a professional position.

When the recession hit and community college enrollment soared (Fry, 2009), many four-year colleges saw an influx of transfer students. In our own program, half of our new students were transfer students, a trend that has remained unchanged even as the economy has improved and community college enrollments have declined (Fain, 2014). This shift in our population forced us to reexamine the ways that we integrated transfer students into a population of students who came to us as freshmen. Thus was born the pilot study that focused on engaging transfer students in internships and co-curricular activities. The current study expands on the pilot study with a large-scale look at students across mass communication programs.
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

During an interview that was part of the pilot study, one of our students said, “You know, being a transfer student is like entering the game at halftime. You want to be in the game, but you aren’t sure what happened before.” It was a perfect metaphor for this population of students who come to our programs with diverse backgrounds and experiences. And yet our responsibility to those students to prepare them for careers, or graduate school, remains the same. The current study is a start at trying to bridge that gap by examining the experiences from the perspective of students in our programs.

**Literature Review**

The mass communication field provides limited research on the subject of internships and almost nothing on engaging students in co-curricular activities. Three areas of internship study that have appeared in refereed mass communication journals include research that compares student and supervisor evaluations of intern performance (McDonough, Rodrigez, and Prior-Miller, 2009); a study of factors that lead to a successful internship experience for students (Beard and Mortin, 1999); and a look at student interns’ expectations and learning goals (Basow and Byrne, 1993). Research on internships in other disciplines have followed a similar pattern, including studies on whether work site supervisors and student interns agree on the most important elements of an internship experience (Henry, Rehwalt, and Vineyard, 2001; Gordon, 2002), a large-scale study of whether interns meet supervisor expectations in the field of business communication (Sapp and Zhang, 2009); and more recently a study of how participating in internships helps students narrow the work-expectation-reality gap (Barnett, 2012).

While these studies are helpful to understanding trends among students already involved in their departments’ internship programs, they do not deal specifically with the more basic question of how to actually engage students in internships and co-curricular activities. Additionally, the research
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shows some distressing differences between participation by transfer students and those who have been at the same school since freshman year.

The most relevant source for research on this topic comes from the National Survey on Student Engagement, known as “NSSE” (pronounced “Nessie”). The survey is based in the Center for Post Secondary Research at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana (“National Survey of Student Engagement,” n.d.).

While various forms of the survey have been conducted at over 1300 colleges and universities since its inception in 2000, the 2009 study included a comparison between “native” college students (those who had not transferred and had been at their schools since freshmen year) and two types of transfer students—vertical transfer students, who transferred from community colleges, and horizontal transfers, who transferred from other four year colleges. The NSSE survey showed that transfer students tended to lag behind natives in all forms of high-impact activities including doing internships (as well as study abroad and doing research with a faculty member). While 62% of natives had participated in internships by their senior years, the study found that 49% of horizontal transfer students had participated and only 42% of vertical transfers had done so (Terris, 2009). Interestingly, Woolsey and Johnson (2006) found that transfer students weren’t as involved as native students even when they lived on campus, dispelling the notion that it’s because transfer students often commute that they have lower levels of involvement. The authors point out that transfer students have limited orientation and are often housed with first-year students, so they don’t get the same exposure to the academic and co-curricular opportunities that are described during freshmen orientation (p. 29). At the same time, a study at George Mason University revealed that, while transfer students were not involved in campus clubs and activities, they still felt engaged with the university through their professors and classes (Lester et al., 2013). This finding, however,
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does not address the issue of career preparation through some of these co-curricular activities as are found in departments of mass communication.

Wang and Wharton (2010) have also compared the participation of transfer students in college life to that of their native counterparts on campus. Their survey of over 3100 students (689 of them transfer students) at a public university in the Midwest, revealed that transfer students were less involved socially, less likely to use support services, and participated less in campus events and student organizations than students who had arrived on campus as freshmen (p. 49). Wang and Wharton’s study was one of the first to examine transfer students using a behavioral component; prior research had focused on factors like attrition, graduation rates, and academic probation in predicting academic success among transfer students (p. 50).

Additionally, Wang and Wharton suggest that research on transfer students can be based on a conceptual framework derived from Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement, in which student involvement was defined as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 51). Wang and Wharton expanded on the basic theory so that they were able to operationalize the main components of student involvement: academic involvement, social involvement, participation in student organizations, and use of student support services (pp. 51-52). While only two of the dimensions, academic involvement and participation in student organizations, most directly related to the concerns of this study, Astin’s theoretical constructs underlying the Wang and Wharton study offer a conceptual framework for this and future studies. Further, it may be likely that students who are involved with their peers and willing to use support services are more likely to be involved in co-curricular activities and internships during their undergraduate years.
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The current study, building on the pilot study reported in 2010, attempts to address some of the gaps in the literature by examining the engagement of native and transfer students in internships and co-curricular activities within mass communication programs.

Data Collection Procedures

The data for this study was collected in two phases over two years. In each phase, there was a quantitative and a qualitative component. The quantitative component was the large-scale survey that all participants in the study completed, while the qualitative measures were based on individual interviews with volunteers from the survey respondents.

The subjects in this study were students in mass communication programs listed in the AEJMC directory. In both phases of the study, the most recent directory was used to identify 10% of the programs. In Phase 1 (2011 directory), this number was 53 schools, and in Phase 2 (2013 directory), the number was 44 schools. If a school that was part of Phase 1 was also identified in the random sample as eligible for Phase 2, the next school on the list was selected to participate.

Once a program was identified for the study, the department’s website was checked to verify the name and contact information of the department chair. An email was sent to the chair asking that the survey be forwarded to the majors in his/her department. After two weeks, chairs who had not responded to the request to forward the survey were sent a reminder email.

Some chairs responded verifying that the survey had been distributed. Others mentioned posting it on their department Facebook page or website. If the chair refused to forward the email, the next school in the directory was chosen for participation. When emails bounced back, every
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effort was made to contact the department and verify the name and contact information of the department chair before moving on to the next school in the directory.

The survey used for this study was distributed using Qualtrics and was based on the survey used for the pilot study that was reported in 2010, with the general framework taken from the NSSE studies. Additional questions were asked in order to filter responses by native and transfer students and to widen the scope of activities that respondents could report within their communication programs. The survey was pretested by several colleagues, a class of students in an upper-level psychology course in statistics and research design, and students in a research seminar at a large university in the East. (A text version of the Qualtrics survey appears in Appendix A.)

The final question in the survey asked respondents if they would be interested in participating in an interview with the researcher. Volunteers were contacted by the researcher or a student research assistant via email to set a time to be interviewed via phone or Skype. (A copy of the interview questions appears in Appendix B.)

Because of the nature of schools that are members of AEJMC, the subject pool appeared to be biased in terms of size and location. Even with a random sample in both phases of the study, the sample tended to favor large universities in the South and West. As a result, the researcher added to the qualitative information in the study by conducting focus groups with students at several institutions in the East. These included two small liberal arts schools, two large research 1 institutions, and one Historically Black College.
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**Findings: Quantitative Data**

Over the two phases of the study, a total of 609 students completed the survey. The results for both phases are combined in this report because the exact same survey was distributed in both phases and no school that was contacted for phase 1 was contacted for phase 2. Of the 609 students who completed the survey, 191, or 31% were transfer students. The majority of those students transferred with an Associates’ degree from a community college (55%), while 26% transferred from a two-year school without earning a degree, and 18% transferred from another four-year college. For the ease of the reader, tables with the findings for this study are embedded within this section.

**Completing Internships**

The majority of the students, both native and transfer students had done or planned to do an internship for credit. Only 10% of the students were not planning to complete an internship and 5% were undecided. Fewer students were willing to complete internships without receiving credit, with 16% not planning to intern without getting credit and also 16% undecided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you done or do you plan to do an internship (or co-op) before graduation? - An internship for credit</th>
<th>Have you done or do you plan to do an internship (or co-op) before graduation? - An internship without credit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have already done</td>
<td>Plan to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.98%</td>
<td>52.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.97%</td>
<td>50.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.30%</td>
<td>51.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students were asked how they had made the decision to do an internship and 75% said they decided on their own, while many also noted that their academic advisors or professors talked about the importance of doing internships. The responses were about the same for native and transfer students. In the comments section, a number of students also noted that internships were required in their academic program for graduation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How was decision to do an internship made?</th>
<th>I decided on my own.</th>
<th>Advisor or another professor recommendation</th>
<th>Another student convinced me.</th>
<th>Saw information on department website.</th>
<th>Internship brochure</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77.6%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer students</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69.7%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75.10%</td>
<td>43.87%</td>
<td>15.33%</td>
<td>23.56%</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td>17.43%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For those who did not do an internship, the most common reason for both native and transfer students was time constraints: not being able to fit an internship into their schedules between school and work/other activities (58%) or because of required classes they needed to take (25%). In the “other” category, students noted issues such as not owning a car, not wanting to “work for free” in an internship, and going toward a different career, such as law school, rather than a job in the media. Very few students (4 native and 1 transfer) thought an internship was NOT important in helping to find a job after graduation.
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

### Reason for not doing an internship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for not doing an internship.</th>
<th>Cannot fit in due to required courses</th>
<th>No time in schedule (school, work, other)</th>
<th>Need more information about internships</th>
<th>Not important to finding job after graduation</th>
<th>Not interested</th>
<th>Don't have required GPA</th>
<th>Other (please specify)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freshmen</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot fit in due to required courses</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transfer students</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Joining Co-curricular Activities

Over half the students responding to the survey had joined or planned to join a co-curricular activity, but 34% did not plan to do so. Responses indicated that 57% of native students had joined or planned to join a co-curricular activity, while only 42% of transfer students were involved this way, and 12% more transfer students did not plan to join any co-curricular activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joining Co-curricular Activities</th>
<th>Have already joined</th>
<th>Plan to join</th>
<th>Do not plan to join</th>
<th>Have not decided</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freshman</strong></td>
<td>167</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transfer student</strong></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>218</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

Similar to responses for the internship question, 79% of students said they had decided on their own to join a co-curricular activity, 34% heard about it from a professor, and 27% were influenced by another student (“another student” was influential for only 15% of students when looking at internships). If native and transfer students are separated, however, transfer students rely more on recommendations from advisors and professors to join co-curriculars than native students (42% to 31%, respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision to join co-curricular activity</th>
<th>I decided on my own.</th>
<th>Advisor or professor recommended</th>
<th>Another student convinced me to join</th>
<th>Saw information on department website</th>
<th>Picked up printed information</th>
<th>Other (please specify)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>83.8%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer student</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79.6%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For students who did not plan to become a part of co-curricular activities, again finding time was the most important reason (79%), although transfer students were more likely than native students to cite needing to fill course requirements in order to graduate (28% vs. 19%). Transfer students, however, were less likely to think that co-curricular activities were not important to finding jobs after graduation than were native students (8% vs. 15%).
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime”: An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for not joining co-curricular activities</th>
<th>Too many required courses</th>
<th>No time in schedule</th>
<th>Need more information about co-curriculars</th>
<th>Not important for finding job</th>
<th>Not interested</th>
<th>Other (please specify)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>70.1%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer student</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quality of Information and Advising**

As part of the survey students were also asked about the quality of the information they received about internships and co-curricular activities as well as the quality of academic and career advising in their programs.

Respondents were mixed on how much information they received on internship and co-curricular opportunities, with less than 10% of students rating internship information as excellent and only 7% reporting co-curricular information was excellent. Transfer students were more likely than native students to rate the information they received on co-curricular activities as fair or poor (almost 43%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of information about internships</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer students</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>26.5%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>129</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of information about co-curricular activities</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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<td>7.1%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
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<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer students</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>23.8%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost 80% of both native and transfer students rated academic advising in their program as excellent, very good, or good. The numbers were lower in career advising, with over one-third of the students rating career advising in their program as fair or poor, and only 11% considering career advising to be excellent.
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

Findings: Qualitative Information

The information presented here is based on personal interviews that were conducted with students who took the initial survey and volunteered for interviews with the researcher. A few interviews were conducted by student research assistants in our department. Additional information was garnered from focus groups, all of which were conducted in person by the researcher.

In phase one of the study, 53 of the survey respondents volunteered for an interview; in phase two there were 17 interview volunteers. Of those 70 volunteers, interviews were ultimately conducted with 24 students. Additionally, focus groups were conducted among students in the communications programs at five institutions in the northeast: two at small, liberal arts colleges, two at Research I institutions, and one at a Historically Black College. The number of students in each focus group ranged from 4 to 12.

Student Involvement

Co-curricular activities

Recurring themes throughout the discussions related to how students got involved in co-curricular activities as well as internships. Experiences varied considerably for native and transfer students as well as students at smaller colleges and large universities.

Students who came in as communication majors their freshmen year seemed to be able to more easily get involved in activities, since orientation for first-year students often includes a club fair where new students can learn about and sign up for different organizations. Students who had chosen their major might identify a group related to their career interest and sign up. At some larger
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Institutions, however, these club fairs were crowded and students who signed up for clubs did not always hear back.

Many students remarked that they got involved in specific clubs through professors, either their academic advisors or in their classes. One student noted that her professor was always pushing PRSSA and letting students know about all the events that the group planned. Other students had to work on the campus newspaper or radio station as part of a class and got involved from there. During one focus group, students specifically stated that when they arrived as new students, the seniors who were involved in everything were their role models. They learned from these students that you had to do a lot in order to be successful in this major.

Transfer students had a more difficult time finding their way at large universities. The sense they got was that the co-curricular membership was set, that new students had to start at the bottom and work their way up, and that it would be difficult for them to break into the group mid-way through their college careers. Transfer students also felt they missed a lot of information about the co-curricular activities that were available during freshmen orientation, so they were often not aware of the opportunities. At the same time, some of our interviewees said they specifically transferred so that they could take advantage of a communications program that was not available at their original school, and they sought out co-curricular opportunities. A few of these students got involved in other non-communications activities to get a feel for the campus before applying to be part of a newspaper, TV station, radio station, advertising, or PR club.

Internships

The responses were more similar between the different populations when discussing internships, which are more individual experiences than co-curricular activities and often required as part of the academic program. Quite a few students, native and transfer, said they were on their
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own when looking for internships. There were professors who sent information to classes on occasion, but some students didn’t even know if their communications department had a professor who was in charge of the internship program. Students searched through the Career Center website or just looked on their own and tried to network with friends and family members to obtain internships. Again, in the smaller programs, professors often targeted students with internship opportunities, because they were familiar with the students’ unique abilities and interests.

In the survey over 70% of native students and 50% of transfer students had done or planned to do an internship without receiving credit. When asked about non-credit internships, many students found the credit requirements a hassle or they missed deadlines for signing up. Others did not want to pay for the credits, especially when they were not getting paid for the internship. (The interviewer did not raise this issue with the students, but this practice is illegal and appears to be widespread, at least among the students who took part in this study.)

Engaging students

Many of the interviews yielded predictable responses when students were asked about ways they thought their communication programs could engage more students in internships and co-curricular activities. For example, students said clubs could send out emails about their meetings and events, or have a Facebook page that would give more information about activities and how to get involved. But another student noted: “People are not going to come because they got an e-mail. People are going to come because they have a friend in the club, or because they know an upperclassman who’s in the club, or you know, it’s part of the major and they think that it’s going to help them.”

Students also wanted clear direction on how to get more information about internships in their field of interest and the process of how to prepare and apply for internships. On more than
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

One occasion, the students solicited advice from the researcher about the best way to find internships, how to effectively use LinkedIn, and whether the researcher had contacts in specific geographic areas.

At the same time, emerging from these discussions came some interesting ideas that may be useful to faculty in programs looking to improve student engagement. A few of these student-initiated suggestions included:

1. A communications fair, just for the media-related activities. Such a fair would avoid the crowds associated with club fairs during freshman orientation and would focus the opportunities more on mass communication students’ interests. It was suggested that such a fair be held at the beginning of the spring semester, so students who arrive in the fall could have a chance to settle in, especially important for transfer students.

2. Faculty need to spend more time showing students how internships and co-curricular activities relate directly to the students’ success after college. The feeling that students often voiced is that other students don’t understand why this is so important, and they can get hung up in other aspects of campus life and not consider the importance of these engaging activities.

3. Transfer students often have trouble figuring out what to do, and one institution sponsored a Transfer Day, another a Transfer Evening, when all new transfer students could come and meet with their advisors, other students, and faculty who represent the different areas of mass communication before classes actually begin. At one institution, the Dean was even there to be sure all their questions were answered, and that left a very positive impression on the students who attended.
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

Ultimately, the most frequent comment from the interviewees were that students have to take the initiative on their own and be willing to do whatever it takes if they want to be successful media professionals.

Discussion

The study reported here is an attempt to study student engagement in internships and co-curricular activities from the point of view of mass communication students. The original plan had been to survey only transfer students, but those populations are often difficult to identify when department chairs keep a single email list of their majors. Thus, both native and transfer students were surveyed for this study, with a filter question to keep the populations separated. From surveys sent to 97 programs that are members of AEJMC, a total of 609 replies were received. It is impossible to measure the response rate, since not all chairs indicated the survey had been distributed, and responses were anonymous. The only students whose schools were identified were those who volunteered to participate in the interviews. The responses indicated 69% of those responding were native students and 31% transfer students.

From the survey results, we can see that native and transfer students do internships in about the same numbers, although transfer students were less likely to do an internship without receiving academic credit. Transfer students were also less likely to get involved in co-curricular activities, which may help them build experience and a portfolio of work to successfully secure internships. For those who did not do an internship or join a co-curricular activity, not having time was the most frequent reason for both native and transfer students. Transfer students were also more likely to have extra course requirements which kept them from being able to fit an internship into their schedules.
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

Regarding how they made the decision to do an internship or join a co-curricular activity, survey respondents overwhelmingly said they decided on their own. At the same time, during the interviews, students also described hearing about these opportunities from fellow students or professors. Professors and academic advisors were also seen as actively encouraging students to get involved in internships or campus organizations related to their major.

Students were split on the quality of internship information they received from their departments, with almost 30% of both groups calling the information fair or poor. Native students were more likely to be satisfied with the quality of information on co-curricular activities, although they may learn about these clubs and organizations during freshmen orientation. At the same time, more than 40% of transfer students rated co-curricular information as Fair or Poor.

Students were happy with their academic advising, with almost 80% of both groups saying their academic advising was good, very good, or excellent. When asked about career advising, students were more likely to express dissatisfaction, with over one-third of both populations rating their career advising as fair or poor, and only 11% considering it excellent.

Some of these findings might be explained in terms of Astin’s Theory of Student Involvement, which defines involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (as cited in Wang and Wharton, 2010, p. 51). It could be that students who are not participating in internships and co-curricular activities are not putting energy into finding out about the opportunities that are around them. (In our own program, we often hear from students who have no idea how our internship programs works, in spite of the fact that it is discussed extensively in student orientation, in many courses, by co-curricular advisors, and during an entire class period in our career seminar—required of all majors.)
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

Wang and Wharton operationalize the main components of Astin’s theory to include: academic involvement, social involvement, and participation in student organizations (pp. 51-52). In mass communication programs, this describes students who take advantage of opportunities to be engaged and ultimately successful in their chosen fields. During our interviews, it was clear that students were influenced by other, usually upper-class, students that they saw involved in multiple co-curricular activities and also completing internships. Those students served as role models and often influenced the freshmen and new transfer students to get involved. Faculty also appeared to play a key role, a trend evident in the interview responses as well as in the surveys where 31% of native and 41% of transfer students said the professors had an influence on their decision to join a co-curricular activity. The number was higher for internships, with over 41% in both groups indicating that their professors played a role in their decision to pursue an internship. This is an important finding to operationalize Astin’s theory beyond research done just in the area of student life. The theory might have great relevance to applied academic research, since so many of our students are more focused on careers than graduate school. But, in order to get those jobs, they have to realize that it takes more than a degree. One of our interviewees, a first-year student at a small, liberal arts college, echoed the sentiment expressed by our newspaper advisor:

*If you graduate and you don’t have any experience, you’re not going to get an internship, you’re not going to get a job. It’s just not there. You have to know what you’re doing in all the different areas of the field to get a job.*

It should be noted that faculty play a key role in student engagement through much of educational literature. Thus, faculty need to be cognizant of the need to have relevant information for students and to consider career advising along with academic advising. Students in our interviews said it was important for faculty underscore the importance of career-building activities to finding a professional position after graduation, as some students don’t look far enough ahead to realize that. And yet, ultimately, many of our interviewees said it was up to the student to assume
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

responsibility for his/her own academic success and professional preparation. One of our interviewees, a transfer student to a large public university in the South, probably said it best:

Many people have told me this: it’s going to be up to the person in question. They have to put themselves out there, or else they’re not going to be noticed and they’re not going to notice any opportunities, and that’s just the way it is.

This study is an important step for mass media and communication faculty who wish to reach out to their students to make sure that they have the information they need to make wise choices about their academic programs and things they may do to insure a successful transition to a professional position. Faculty are definitely influential in regard to helping students seek out opportunities in internships and co-curricular activities, and they need to consider a more inclusive approach in their role as career advisors. Very few students find websites and brochures as helpful as a meaningful conversation with a faculty member about their choices in career preparation. While some of our students are truly self-motivated, and some of our upper level students can serve as role models for underclass majors, we cannot rely on our students to figure it out by themselves. During their college years, our students are confronted with many opportunities, but also many distractions. Faculty can help students wade through the clutter to select campus activities and academic internships that will provide them with the highest quality experiences to lead them to successful career preparation. Future research should help us find better ways to do this for all students, both native and transfer students, so that no student slips through the crack and all have equal opportunities for professional success.
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

References


Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.


Terris, B. (2009, November 8). Transfer students are less likely to take part in "high impact" activities. The Chronicle of Higher Education, students.


Appendix A: Student Engagement Survey

Q1 Did you enter this school as a freshman or a transfer student?

☐ Freshman (1)
☐ Transfer student (2)

If Freshman Is Selected, Then Skip To Which of the following have you done ...

Q2 Did you transfer in:

☐ From a two-year college with an Associate's Degree (1)
☐ From a two-year college without a degree (2)
☐ From another four-year college (3)

Q3 Have you done or do you plan to do an internship (or co-op) before graduation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Have already done (1)</th>
<th>Plan to do (2)</th>
<th>Do not plan to do (3)</th>
<th>Have not decided (4)</th>
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<tr>
<td>An internship for credit (1)</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If An internship for credit - ... Is Selected, Then Skip To If you have done an internship or pla...If An internship for credit - ... Is Selected, Then Skip To If you do not plan to do an internshi...

Q4 If you have done an internship or plan to do one, how did you make that decision (check all that apply)?

☐ I decided on my own. (1)
☐ My advisor or another professor recommended that I do an internship. (2)
☐ Another student convinced me that I should do an internship. (3)
☐ I saw information about internships on our department's website. (4)
☐ I picked up an internship brochure that explained the program. (5)
☐ Other (please specify) (6) ____________________

Answer If Have you done or do you plan to do an internship? - Do not plan to do Is Selected
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

Q5 If you do not plan to do an internship, what is the reason (check all that apply)?

- Cannot fit it in due to required courses I need to take (1)
- No time in schedule between school and work/other activities (2)
- Need more information about the internship program at my school (3)
- Do not feel it is important to finding a job after graduation/not interested (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) ____________________

Q6 Have you joined or do you plan to join a co-curricular activity (such as the newspaper or TV station)?

- Have already joined (1)
- plan to join (2)
- Do not plan to do (3)
- Have not decided (4)

If Have already joined Is Selected, Then Skip To Which of the following co-curricular ... If plan to join Is Selected, Then Skip To Which of the following co-curricular ... If Do not plan to do Is Selected, Then Skip To If you do not plan to participate in ...

Q7 Which of the following co-curricular activities have you joined or do you plan to join before graduation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Have joined (1)</th>
<th>Plan to join (2)</th>
<th>Do not plan to do (3)</th>
<th>Have not decided (4)</th>
<th>Not available at my school (5)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campus newspaper or magazine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus radio station</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus television station</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRSSA or Student PR firm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising or Marketing Club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other department activities (please specify)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

Q8 If you have joined a co-curricular activity or plan to join one, how did you make that decision (check all that apply)?

- I decided on my own. (1)
- My advisor or another professor recommended joining a co-curricular activity. (2)
- Another student convinced me that I should join a co-curricular activity. (3)
- I saw information about co-curriculars on our department's website. (4)
- I picked up printed information about co-curricular activities that explained the clubs. (5)
- Other (please specify) (6) ____________________

Answer

Q9 If you do not plan to participate in any co-curricular activities in the department, what is the reason (check all that apply)?

- Cannot fit in due to schedule between school and work/other activities (1)
- Need more information about the co-curricular activities at my school (2)
- Do not feel it is important to finding a job after graduation (3)
- Not interested in any offered activities (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) ____________________

Q10 How would you rate the quality of the information you have received about the department's internship program?

- Excellent (1)
- Very good (2)
- Good (3)
- Fair (4)
- Poor (5)

Q11 How would you rate the quality of the information you have received about the department's co-curricular activities?

- Excellent (1)
- Very Good (2)
- Good (3)
- Fair (4)
- Poor (5)

Q12 How would you rate the quality of advising that you have received?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent (1)</th>
<th>Very Good (2)</th>
<th>Good (3)</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Career Advising (2)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Revisiting “Entering the game at halftime:” An examination of how we engage mass communication students in internships and co-curricular activities.

Q13 If you have any comments about student participation in internships or co-curricular activities, please include them below.

Q14 Thank you for participating in this survey. If you would be willing to participate in a brief interview with the researcher, please include your name, school, and email address below. All responses will be anonymous and confidential.

Appendix B

Questions asked in student interviews and focus groups

1. What year are you in school?
2. Did you come into this school as a freshman or transfer student?
3. Did you declare comm right away?
   a. How did you decide on this major?
4. What kinds of activities are you involved in now in college?
   a. Are you involved in any campus activities
   b. Co-curriculars related to major, such as newspaper, TV, PRSSA…
5. What do you think works best for getting students involved in co-curricular activities?
6. Have you done an internship/plan to do one?
7. What’s the best way to reach students about internships?
8. What kinds of other things have you done/do you plan to do to build your portfolio (e.g., work)?
9. How confident are you about finding a job after graduation?
10. Do you plan to go to graduate school?
11. Do you have any other comments about getting students involved in internships or co-curricular activities?