Internship Preparedness: A Look into the Internship Experience at St. John Fisher College

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Abstract
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St. John Fisher College
Abstract

In the field of sport management, internships have been shown to be an important factor in the initial placement in the sport industry. Previous work has cited both design elements and the experience itself as being critical to internship success or failure. As the SJFC program requires two distinct required experiences, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of these experiences on recent graduate’s confidence levels. Through survey data it was uncovered that participants who indicated a higher satisfaction with their final internship were more likely to end up in a career similar that of their last internship. Additionally, qualitative and quantitative data highlighted the design factors, such as learning opportunities and task variety as a very important factor in determining internship effectiveness. Qualitative data confirmed that many different aspects played a role in the effectiveness of the internship, but what it came down to was the experience itself. Sport management program faculty, current and potential students, and internship supervisors would find this information useful due to the insight this study provides.
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There is a point in time during every sport management student’s career where they must translate what they learned in the classroom into a real world professional setting. Just because a student excels in the classroom does not necessarily mean they would excel on the job when it truly matters. When it comes down to it, all the education in the world can sometimes not prepare you for a career in the field you are interested in. Generally, students will need to step outside their comfort zone, take a risk, and look for experience outside of the classroom. In the sport management field, there is one common way to do that and it is through internships.

Briefly, internships are a way to gain experience outside the classroom. Authors explained, “internships serve to close the gap between learned theory and practical reality and are often the first opportunity for many students to obtain meaningful field experience in their field of study” (Gi-Yong, Diacin, Khojasteh, & Dixon, 2016, p. 30). Therefore, internships are designed to provide a beneficial experience to the students who take them on. However, no two internships are the same.

This is where a gap in knowledge lies. Internships are very subjective to the organization that they are experienced with and the students completing the experience. Authors Kerwin, Odio, and Sagas confirm the drawbacks of internships if the design is not conducive to learning (Kerwin, Odio & Sagas, 2014). Sometimes, students can even leave an internship experience feeling more confused about what they want to do with their careers than when they started (Kerwin, Odio & Sagas, 2014).

Although internships are subjective to the organization where they are conducted, they still remain a crucial part of sport management curriculum across the country. Based on a recent study, “those who reported satisfaction with the internship experience were more likely to enter
the field after graduation than those reporting dissatisfaction” (Gi-Yong, Diacin, Khojasteh, & Dixon, 2016). However, determining what factors contributed to that satisfaction or dissatisfaction remains unclear to those who work with interns. Therefore, it becomes important to understand the elements that shape internships in order to provide an overall increase in internship satisfaction.

Existing research has demonstrated that many factors shape the internship experiences. Already known to be of importance are internship design, individual factors, and student progression from school into a career. By exploring these concepts in a sport setting, we can begin to understand whether the participants felt like the internships prepared them for the next step of their life.

**Literature Review**

**Internships Defined**

For a number of years, sport management programs have been urging students to complete an internship in order to gain more industry experience (Chinomona & Surujlal, 2012). The importance of the internship in sports can be traced back to as early as the 1980’s (Chinomona & Surujlal, 2012). In particular, 2002-2012 has seen a significant rise in the use of internships in order to gain real-world experience in a selected field (Chinomona & Surujlal, 2012). This sudden rise in internships across the country has caused a significant amount of subjectivity to go along with it. There is no standard practice when it comes to internships. Therefore, no two are the same.

Today, it seems like a majority of professional and collegiate sport organizations implement the internship due to the value that it brings with it. One recent study noted, “the internship serves as an opportunity for advancement that could result in a full-time position at the
organization where the internship was completed” (Gi-Yong, Diacin, Khojasteh, & Dixon, 2016). It is a means to getting your feet in the door at a desired organization or in a desired field without full employment. That is the risk you take when completing an internship. You are not fully employed so your work environment could be totally different than that of your internship supervisor or other employees. Therefore, a significant component to internships is the structure in which they are conducted or for the sake of this research study will be labeled as “internship design”.

**Internship Design Factors**

The internship is very subjective and it can include very different job descriptions and structures depending on where it is conducted. According to Chouinard, “the characteristics of a sound internship program depend on the physical, technical, and human resources available” (Chouinard, 1993, p. 97). Ultimately, whether or not your internship will provide you adequate working space, a computer, or close guidance all relate to the three components outlined by Chouinard. In this paper, those elements were translated into internship design factors, which have to do more with the human resource capabilities of the internship. The reason for looking at human resources design factors is because coordinators or instructors involved in setting up the internship experience must be completely invested in the process for it to be effective. A disengaged internship coordinator can often mean the difference between a positive and a negative experience (Chouinard, 1993, p. 97).

Additionally, Chouinard states that “the responsibility of providing relevant instruction and feedback to students before, during, and after their internships” is one of the major foundations of a successful internship (Chouinard, 1993, p.98). Fukami, Narayanan, and Olk (2010) agree with Chouinard, they state that “having a mentor was found to be critical even if the
mentor–protégé’ relationship was limited to brief periods of time. For satisfaction, there was consistency in examining what students find rewarding about an internship” (Fukami, Narayanan, & Olk, 2010, p. 62). Clearly, in order for internships to be successful, supervision and resources must be provided to the students.

Internship design also relates to what parts of the experience students find the most important. Whether or not interns were given high or low task variety was found to be unanimously important according to Fukami, Narayanan, & Olk (2010). Sometimes experiences provide interns with dozens of different tasks to complete. Depending on the area of the internship, this can mean getting a little bit of work in multiple departments. These types of experiences are often viewed as the more beneficial and effective internships (Fukami, Narayanan, & Olk, 2010).

A final factor of internship design relates to the amount of learning opportunities available. In the study by Kerwin, Odio, and Sagas, students agreed that during their internship experience they gained some skills that could be transferred back to the classroom and to future positions (Kerwin, Odio, & Sagas, 2014). The researchers broke down this category into three sections: “knowledge, job-specific skills, and transferable skills” (Kerwin, Odio, & Sagas, 2014). What the author means is that each intern can take away certain skills or knowledge from the experience. For example, a high variety of tasks at an internship may provide an intern with more job-specific skills moving forward in their career. Additionally, frequent learning opportunities may provide an intern with more knowledge moving forward in their academic and professional career. The research concluded that if interns were given monotonous tasks that inhibited their learning opportunities then the internship experience would be significantly less effective (Kerwin, Odio, & Sagas, 2014).
Ultimately, it is important to understand all the components that go into internship design. From supervision, task variety, and learning opportunities, internship experiences can vary significantly. One individual’s experience can be totally different from another’s even if these two are in the same class, same year of school, and possess relatively the same interests. The design of the internship is crucial to its short-term and long-term effectiveness.

**Career Choice**

Internships are often viewed as one of the main ways to break into the sport industry. Generally, students who complete these experiences have a better idea of what they want to do with their lives (Kerwin, Odio, & Sagas, 2014). They further elaborate:

After the internship, students’ decision frames appeared more developed but many students were still unclear about their future. Despite this, the internship experience clearly provokes changes to the decision frame. For the most part the changes were not drastic, but did influence the criteria students planned to use in their job search (p. 55)

Although not significant, the change in mindset was clear through the discussed study. Researchers proved that students at least gathered a better perspective on what job they wanted to search for. That being said, the job that interns search for after the experience is not always in the same area as the internship was completed in. According to Kerwin, Odio, and Sagas, students who complete internships do not always end up in the same field. In their study, looked at several sport management majors who had completed internships and then made changes in their career path after the experience. The authors explained:

The pervasive sense of uncertainty most students had before their internship persisted for most. Only one of the participants had acquired a full-time position, three had enrolled in graduate school, and the rest were in the job search process and graduating without securing long-term employment. (Kerwin, Odio, & Sagas, 2014)
This means that very few of the former students that were interviewed ended up in the sport industry after internship completion. One participant in the study actually noted a direct result of his internship. This participant, “Andy”, learned that he did not want to work in the golf industry as a result of his experience (Kerwin, Odio, & Sagas, 2014). Although that is just one example, this is a symbol of what this research seeks to uncover. Perhaps many of the participants that this research aims to use had similar experiences to Andy. Overall, these factors had a direct result on the post-internship mindsets of each of the individuals studied.

In a similar study, authors Cunningham, Kent, and Sagas (2008) further discuss the effect of the internship on sport management students. They make a good point that most of the time, the internship is one of the final steps in the sport management program process. In a recent study, authors stated “The purpose of the internship is to help students develop and then refine skills and expertise relevant to their field” (Gi-Yong, Diacin, Khojasteh, & Dixon, 2016, p.31). That means, almost all of the experiences that occur in the final internship will be remembered by the student and will directly impact their decisions post-graduation (Cunningham, Kent, & Sagas, 2005). They explain, “Given this proximity, any positive or negative experiences during an internship can possibly have an impact on the interns’ subsequent career-related affect and behaviors” (Cunningham, Kent, & Sagas, 2005, p.45). Based on these studies, the internship has a direct impact on the career choice of the student and sometimes, the career choice is not in the same area that they completed the internship in.

**Individual Factors Relating to Student’s Career Path**

There are a number of factors that can influence a student’s career path in the sport industry and in their academic career. Whether or not an internship was paid was also a factor looked at in this study. According to a 2015 survey of graduating seniors, “students who took
paid internships were more likely to get a full-time job post-graduation, as well as make a higher salary than students who took unpaid internships” (Farber, 2016, p.1). For that reason, paid internships are significantly more desirable than unpaid ones. However, college students do not always have the luxury of a paid internship due to a number of external factors, such as transportation, availability, and when the experience was looking to be completed. Therefore, whether the internship was paid or unpaid relates to that individual's personal experience.

**Purpose Statement**

As the previous review of literature suggests, there are many different factors that play into the design of the internship, the individuals, and the impact of that internship. Therefore, this research study will focus on a multiple research questions. However, the overall purpose of this research is to uncover how the internship experience at St. John Fisher College impacted recent graduates’ confidence levels and how that affected the sport industry segment they ended up in. This study can help St. John Fisher College Sport Management professors recommend, guide, and advise students on which internships to take. This study can assist internship directors and supervisors at various sports organizations because they will be able to determine some of the more valuable characteristics of an internship. Moreover, this study can be used by current St. John Fisher College Sport Management students because they will be able to look at how other graduates felt after they completed their own internships. These issues will provide the basis for this study. Furthermore, the scope of the following research questions are broad, but did limit the scope of the inquiry into:

1. To what extent did 390/490 prepare students for the experiences to follow?
2. In what ways did internship experiences change student confidence levels?
3. What are common internship design elements for St. John Fisher College SPST graduates?
4. Does internship/practicum satisfaction impact what segment of the sport industry students ended up in after graduation?

**Method**

This research was pure because we set out to simply gain a better understanding of a phenomenon rather than solve a particular problem (Jones, 2015). It had no immediate value other than providing long term knowledge of the respective topic. Although this information could potentially be used by the St. John Fisher College Sport Management staff to adjust certain aspects of the internship experience, there is no direct intent for it to do so.

Primary research is collected by the researcher. Therefore, this research was primary because we obtained our own data through a developed method. We used an online survey that was emailed out to chosen individuals (Jones, 2015). Primary research is simply collecting your own data and this study is a perfect example of such a research method (Jones, 2015).

Explanatory research assesses casual relationships between variables, such as the relationship between personal factors and internship effectiveness (Jones, 2015). This study is comprised of four different concept areas where we drew several conclusion from the data. This study looked for “casual relationships” and correlations between particular factors of St. John Fisher sport management students. For example, the relationship between internship effectiveness and what segment of the sport industry participants pursued after graduation.

This research was rooted in the interpretivist paradigm as specific understanding of contexts and participants was desired. In this approach, the answers frequently cannot be broken down into numbers as words are the focus of understanding (Jones, 2015). Therefore, non-numerical statements, for example if the semester an internship was completed impacted the effectiveness for the practicum. Therefore, findings of this study are very much interpretivism
because the research deals with several relationships between variables and then applying them to the St. John Fisher College sport management program.

**Participant/Sample Selection**

The target population was 66 recent graduates of the sport management program. These participants were accessed through the sport management database provided by the experiential coordinator. These participants were sport management majors at St. John Fisher College and therefore completed the Practicum and Internship between the academic years of 2014-2016. This declaration of years was done due to the fact that the researcher wanted to keep the information relevant to students still currently in the program. Additionally, previous research confirmed that in smaller samples, researchers were able to collect more “rich data” (Blank, Fuller, & Sweeney, 2014).

The reason for cutting off the number of participants at 66 was because anymore participants and the graduates would have come from over three years. Due to that fact, there may have been courses or program styles in place over three years, which would make the data less applicable to the current St. John Fisher College sport management department.

The researcher did not fully expect to receive all 66 responses back and was hoping for at least one third of the total population. One-third of the population would give the researcher 22 participants and that is a usable number for this kind of research for a number of reasons. In one study, authors only surveyed 9 because they were seeking rich data in the form of interviews. Although this study is through an online survey, there were three questions within the survey that allowed the researcher to extract that “rich data” as the author called it. That “rich data” refers to more qualitative responses that were important in answering questions that dealt with why rather than what (Blank, Fuller, & Sweeney, 2014). They further explained “in-depth information from
a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information-rich” (Blank, Fuller, & Sweeney, 2014, p. 227).

**Variable Operationalization**

The variables presented in this study are primarily ordinal values because the questions in the survey are coded by order and have to do with concepts, such as satisfaction, effectiveness, and frequency. These are all concepts generally looked at in ordinal scales. Ordinal scales place answer choices in a particular order due to the nature of the question. For example, rating your satisfaction with the Internship experience. Due to that fact, there is no numerical or measurable difference between the answer choices other than the order they are placed. (Jones, p. 96).

The variables being looked at in this study were focused on three different themes. Those themes were individual factors related to the experience, internship design factors, and career choice factors. Individual factors related to the experience came from previous research, such as Fukami’s (2010) focus on the compensation provided at internships. Other individual factors included transportation and what semester the internships were completed in. These factors, although not highlighted by previous research, were important due to the nature of internships at St. John Fisher College in particular. The semester an internship was completed and whether or not transportation played a role in the decision making process for an internship were variables of interest by the researcher and included in the study.

Internship design, the second theme, included several variables from previous research. The variables used supported Fukami’s (2010) importance of physical structure through staff impact and the type of supervision given at the experience. Additionally, Chouinard’s importance of the type of internship also related to the work of Fukami because it analyzed the importance of the physical components of the internship (1993). In particular, the study by
Fukami (2010) highlighted factors, such as task variety, learning opportunities, and the work itself at the experience. These factors are key components to what directly constitutes the internship design and therefore they were essential for this study.

The third theme, career choice, also drew from existing literature focusing on the impact of the internship on the career choice of that individual (Kerwin, Odio, & Sagas, 2014); authors reveal that internships directly relate to student’s career trajectory. Due to that fact, variables were created to highlight the findings of the research study, such as the employment area student’s ended up in after the final internship and how satisfied the participants were with their final experience. According to

With any qualitative data, the researcher is generally not searching for one, single truth, but a number of different relationships between variables. This study provides the opportunity to ask multiple questions and uncover “rich data” on the participants and their experiences. Although there are only three questions that directly deal with qualitative data, the quantitative data still provides an element of “rich data” that traditional quantitative data does not. All of the variables looked at in this research are focused on elements of previous literature that may be a factor in the impact of internships.

**Data Collection Instrument**

This study consisted of a survey that was sent out to a specific population (see Figure 1). An electronic survey from Qualtrics was designed to collect preliminary data. Surveys have been found to be beneficial research tools as they allow the researcher to ask specific questions to the participants; specifically using scaled questions where participants could select the most appropriate response (Jones, p. 148-150).
A majority of the questions were multiple choice, single answer, and 5 choices arranged horizontally (see Figure 3). There were also a small number of multiple questions that had 3 questions and allowed for more than one answer (see Figure 3). Finally, there were a total of 3 questions that were single line text entry responses (see Figure 3). That is where the qualitative data came from because the participants were able to answer the why more than the what.

Lastly, none of the questions in the survey were force response questions because the researcher did not want to pressure any response where the participant did not feel comfortable responding. The result of that decision was positive and negative because during the text entry questions, there were generally 2-3 missing responses, which proved that some participants did not want to answer that question.

The survey contained 22 questions that were based around three different themes, but separated by the Practicum and Internship. Previous literature confirmed the three themes, but in the survey itself, breaking the instrument down by the Practicum and Internship was logical because of the way in which those experiences were completed. Students complete the Practicum first and the Internship second so the researcher found it important to break the survey up in a similar way. Therefore, the questions do not mix with each other and participants are clear on the parameters of the question. In regards to the content, the majority of questions presented in the survey came from the internship design factors area, however the other two themes were present and important in order to obtain meaningful results (see Figure 1).

**Data Collection Process**

The data collection began with gathering participants contact information through the St. John Fisher College Sport Management department. Mr. Patrick Gordon assisted in the gathering of the contact information through his role as Director of Experiential Learning and
Outreach. Mr. Gordon shared a Google document that consisted of the names and other information about graduates of the program. The sheet was first sorted by graduation year to meet the sample parameters. That Google document was not 100% complete of all contact information for each graduate of the program so the researcher went through the list and had to fill in any missing emails for graduates that fit into the population. Through a combination of looking at LinkedIn and utilizing prior St. John Fisher College email accounts, the researcher was able to gather a population that fit the requirements of the study.

After the population was gathered, the researcher created the survey in Qualtrics and developed a cover letter inviting individuals to participate (see Figure 2). Then, the researcher pilot tested the survey to check for any problems in the completion of it (Jones, p. 164). Pilot testing was done by sending drafts of the survey out to experienced professionals who have worked with Qualtrics before. Ms. Robin Schmid assisted with the development of my survey by checking it over for any problems and providing her experienced knowledge on the topic.

After the survey was cleared to be sent out, the entire selected population from the sport management Google document was added to Qualtrics in the “contacts” section. By adding the contacts, the survey was ready to be sent out. On October 18th at 8:18 AM, the survey was sent out to a total of 66 individuals (see Figure 2). After the survey was initially sent out, the researcher carefully monitored the responses that were developing. On October 24th at 9:38 AM, the researcher sent out a reminder email to all non-participants (see Figure 3). Finally, on October 28th the survey was closed. Thank you emails were sent to all participants (see Figure 4).

After the survey window was closed, the data was downloaded as a .CSV file, which allowed the research to analyze the data in Microsoft Excel. However, in the download process,
the researcher chose to download the data as numerical values. This allowed the researcher to discover the mean, median, and mode of the data set. If the data had been downloaded as scaled question response, then it would have been impossible to determine the mean, median, and mode for words. Soon after, the researcher organized the results and removed any unnecessary information that did not apply to the research (Jones, p. 248).

The last step that the researcher used in Excel was sorting the data between quantitative and qualitative data. There were three qualitative questions that the researcher had to place in a separate tab of Excel and work with that data differently. The qualitative data required the researcher to go through each individual response and code them into a category. After all the qualitative data was coded, the researcher could then create a series of graphs that depicted what the qualitative responses focused on. On the other side, the quantitative data was then moved into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science), where further tests could be run on the responses.

**Data Analysis Plan**

Descriptive statistics of mean, median, and mode were first analyzed in Microsoft Excel. Excel only has the capability to run basic formulas, but Excel is significantly more user friendly than SPSS. Although simple by design, the mean, median, and mode offered valuable insight into how the overall population answered specific responses. The mean was very useful because you could pinpoint exactly where the population fell on a given question. For example, when the responses were coded into numerical values for Excel, it allowed the researcher to calculate the mean response for each question.

SPSS was very important in analyzing what factors truly impacted each other. The researcher created a worksheet that listed pairs of variables of interest (see table 5). For
example, the researcher looked at the staff impact during the internship and the internship satisfaction (see table 5). The researcher utilized the correlate function in SPSS. This provided the researcher with the Pearson Chi-Square value. The researcher then determined how significant the value was. If the value was under .05 then it was a significant relationship. If the value was .01 then it was very significant. However, if the value was over .05 then it lacked significance. However, it was important to note values that were right on the edge of .05 because that still showed that the two variables had more significance than others (see table 5).

The qualitative data was analyzed by going through each individual response and coding them to a theme. The researcher used color coding to sort which data applied to which theme of response. Themes were based on each of the text responses directly from the participants. If a new theme was found, then it was added to the code book where additional participant responses could be tallied as well. Then horizontal bar graphs were developed that showed the number of responses that pertained to each theme. Questions 11, 13, and 24 were the questions used to generate graphs highlighting participant’s responses (tables 7-9).

Results

Internships are arguably the most important piece of the sport management program not only at St. John Fisher College, but at institutions across the United States. Although, St. John Fisher College sport management graduates were used as the population for this research, this study can most definitely be applied to other institutions of similar size. This research set out to answer four research questions about how the internship experiences impacted participants’ confidence levels, what common design elements were, and if experience satisfaction played a role in what career segment students ended up in. The value of this research can not only be used by sport management program directors, but it can be used by students to ease their skepticism of
internships. These findings are a valuable resource to students, professors, and internship supervisors.

This research consisted of 19 questions that could be broken down into descriptive and inferential questions. Of those 19 questions, the researcher looked at the means or averages of the participant responses. However, only 15 of those questions proved to be valuable in determining the mean because the remaining questions had 3 or less answer choices. According to the data, participants most frequently completed SPST 390 in the spring (n=2). Participants most frequently completed SPST 490 in the summer (n=3). During participants time searching for internships, transportation did not have an impact on the internship process (n=2). Compensation was another factor looked at in this research. It was determined that the majority of the participants had “neither experience paid” when it came to describing their compensation for SPST 390 and SPST 490 (n=1).

The researcher also worked with the means of the data set as well. This data was divided into sections dealing with the Practicum and Internship experience. In the Practicum, participants rated their confidence, in regards to their preparedness, entering their experience. The mean of that question was (n=3.55). That value placed the average of responses between the “neutral” and “slightly more confident” answer. Participants were not significantly stressed during their Practicum experiences (n=2.33). That places their stress level slightly under the response “neutral” on the responses. Participants were more confident after their Practicum experience than prior. In fact, the data indicated that participants were a full 1.0 more confident (n=4.55). The Practicum also had a slight effect on preparing students for the remaining part of their education (n=2.9). Although not a drastic impact, that value still indicates a positive effect of the Practicum. Lastly, participants were definitely satisfied with their Practicum experience.
When asked how satisfied they [the participants] were with their Practicum, responses were between satisfied and very satisfied (n=4.1).

17 Chi-Square tests were completed using SPSS software in this research. Of those 17, a total 6 yielded a significant result. In order to be classified as significant, the Chi-Square test must show a Pearson value under .05 (p<.05) and in order to be classified as very significant the correlation must show a value less than .01 (p<.01). Four elements of internship design exhibited significant relationships to the overall internship satisfaction. Task variety, staff impact, learning opportunities, and networking opportunities all showed significant relationships to internship satisfaction when Chi-Square tests were ran in SPSS. Table 5 displays all the Pearson chi-square values that were ran. All four of the elements of internship design that had significant Chi-Square tests were under .024. Therefore, those elements directly influence internship satisfaction (see table 5).

Confidence after internship was directly related to the employment area that participants ended up in. When Chi-Square tests were ran in SPSS connecting the two variables, a Pearson chi-square value of .022 was found. That value is slightly above .01, which still makes the relationship significant. Additionally, Internship satisfaction and the employment area showed a Pearson value of .178, which is still very low, but not significant. Therefore, the value is worth noting because it is the closest of the values not technically qualified as significant (see table 5).

Qualitative research provided a deeper look into how internships impacted recent graduates of the St. John Fisher College sport management program. The first qualitative question looked at how the participant’s confidence changed from before to after in the Practicum experience. Responses were coded into themes and then loaded into a bar graph so the researcher could more effectively display the data. The dominant factor that contributed to why participants’ confidence
changed over the course of the Practicum was because of the experience itself. The data showed that 36% of participants indicated the actual experience was the most influential factor of why their confidence changed. Even if the experience was not completely positive, participants found that simply being at the Practicum and in the real world directly impacted their confidence. Participant A explained, “My confidence changed due to experience and knowledge during my practicum and I realized how valuable I could be to an organization”. That quote highlights the effect of being at the Practicum and gaining experience, positive or negative. There is no mention from participant A on the quality of the experience. However, the response leans more towards the simple act of just gaining experience proved to be most beneficial for this participant.

The second qualitative question dealt with understanding how effective the Practicum was at preparing students for the remaining part of their education. In particular, the question looked at the main factor that contributed to the Practicum effectiveness. Participants displayed a range of answers for this question. According to the data, 36% of participants provided slightly negative responses about the Practicum experience. Participant B mentioned “Didn't learn as much from my practicum as I wanted”. Additionally, participant C said “Practicum ended up being just a lot of office paperwork”. These responses should be taken into consideration with the subjective nature of experiences. Some students completed their Practicum as their only class that semester, while others balanced classes on top of the Practicum. One participant noted, “My last two classes to graduate were my internship and practicum, so I didn't have to balance them with other classes”. That could be the reason for a participant like this one having a more effective experience compared to one that had to balance the Practicum among other things. Lastly, increased transferrable skills were a popular response in this question. 27% of participants hinted that learning transferrable skills was a main component in the effectiveness of their Practicum.
Participant D said, “I was able to use my experiences as discussion points during class”. That fact brings a number of benefits to not only the student at the time, but other students in the class. Through class discussions, students who completed Practicums could provide valuable insight into real world experience.

The final qualitative question looked at the main factor that contributed to participants’ change in confidence after the final Internship was completed. It was found that 38% of participants indicated an increase in overall comfort as the main factor that contributed to their increase in confidence after their final internship. An increase in comfort is important because students could feel a greater sense of achievement in that particular field and then be more likely to apply for a job in that field (Chinomona & Surujlal, 2012, p. 4). Additionally, 33% of the participants mentioned the actual work was the main factor that contributed to increasing their confidence. Participant E explained, “I worked in sales for my internship and was not comfortable talking to people on the phone at first, but now it is a walk in the park”. This response was very informative for two reasons. First, it directly applied to the “actual work” category because working in sales clearly had an impact on the participant’s confidence. Second, this response applied to “comfort” because when they mentioned “now it is a walk in the park”, that ultimately means they became more comfortable in that role.

**Discussion**

Following the previous research on the impact of internships at St. John Fisher College, several conclusions were drawn. The results were generally supportive of the research questions that the researcher set out to understand. In addition, the results tended to follow a very straightforward path that indicated the more experience a student gained, the more confident they
became. Finally, the qualitative data that we discovered confirmed much of the quantitative data so a majority of the responses aligned very well.

The first research questions asked to what extent students felt prepared for what came after college. This can be answered through the combination of two of our survey questions. In question 25, participants indicated that they were very satisfied with their final internship experience. In fact, the majority of participants selected that they were “very satisfied” with their experience. The fact that they were very satisfied with their final internship so close to graduation at least proves that the participants gained some valuable experience. Additionally, students showed significant progress throughout their college career. According to table 1, participants felt an increase in both confidence and satisfaction as they moved through their college path. The fact that students showed that much growth throughout college would prove their readiness for the professional world. However, it should be noted that no question was directly asked to what extent the participants were prepared for what came after college and that is a gap in the research that was conducted. There was still substantial data was collected from other questions that allowed the researcher to draw this conclusion. Together, the quantitative and qualitative showed a theme that suggested participants were prepared for what came after college.

The Practicum and Internship at St. John Fisher College had a significant impact on student’s confidence levels. Table 1 directly shows the changes that occurred throughout the data. On average, we saw an increase in student’s confidence from before to after each experience. That applies to both the Practicum and Internship. The increase of confidence from before to after each experience is a very positive sign toward not only the meaningfulness of internships, but the impact of the St. John Fisher College sport management program. Recent
graduates clearly stated that they were more confident the further they went along with their internships. Therefore, internships had a positive impact on student’s confidence levels.

Research question three dealt with learning what the common design elements of internships were. The research provided us with several different elements. First, it was found that 84% of participants said that transportation did not play a role in their internship decision process. Therefore, students did not take transportation into account when deciding what internship to take. Following that, 47% of participants said that neither of their experiences were paid. That fact is interesting because it refutes common belief that internships must be paid in order for them to be successful. It also gives confidence to current St. John Fisher College sport management students because they can see how many recent graduated did not have paid internships, but were still very satisfied with their overall experience.

There were other design elements looked at in this research. Internship stress, task variety, learning opportunities, networking opportunities, and staff impact were all important design elements looked at. In regards to stress levels, participants showed that this element had no impact on them while at the experience. However, the remaining elements proved to be much more meaningful to the participants. It was shown that the staff and task variety had a positive impact on the majority of the participants. Additionally, the participants stated that networking opportunities were very frequent at their respective experiences. Lastly, learning opportunities were frequent, but not as much as networking opportunities.

Research question four focused on determining if the Internship/Practicum satisfaction impacted the segment of the sport industry participants ended up in after graduation. This question can be answered using a combination of questions as well. In table 4, one can see that 63% of participants ended up in a sport industry segment similar to that of where they completed their
final internship. The fact that 63% of participants chose that response shows that significantly more than half of the participants went to work in a field similar to their final internship. Moreover, overall satisfaction with the final Internship was determined to be an average of 4.55. That value is the highest satisfaction value recorded during this research and places the average of participant’s satisfaction close to the “very satisfied” range. Looking at all of this, it is fair to say that if students were satisfied with their final experience then they most likely ended up in a sport industry segment similar to where they completed their final experience. There was a direct correlation between internship satisfaction and where students ended up after graduation.

There are a number of aspects that should be noted based on this research. First, 7 participants ended up in a segment of the sport industry other than where they completed their final internship. Therefore, just because they did not end up in a field close to their internship, does not mean the internship satisfaction did not play a role. The participant at the time may have used the internship as a means of understanding where he or she did or did not want to work after graduation.

**Implications on Sport Management Field**

This research can prove to be beneficial for a number of different groups. Due to the fact that internships are so widely used across sport management programs nationally, faculty could potentially use this research to ensure younger students on the impact of internships. As an entry level student presented with the task of completing a sport management internship, such a student could take comfort in knowing that just because they do not find the perfect internship, does not mean it will not benefit them. Participants in this study suggested that the focus was on the learning opportunities, staff impact, networking opportunities, and task variety as opposed to the compensation and transportation.
Not every qualitative response received from participants was completely positive. Sport management faculty could investigate some of the responses that indicated a less than ideal experience for the student. Then the faculty could determine if the issues were due to the internship site, staff, or the student alone. That could potentially help future students from taking an internship at a site that has yielded several negative experiences in the past.

In the big picture, findings, such as these could impact sport management programs as a whole. The results of this study could potentially hinder programs that focus their efforts on findings students the perfect internship. By that, it is meant that some programs may promise students the paid and conveniently placed internship because that will improve their internship satisfaction. When this study proved the opposite of that fact. Ultimately, the findings of this study promoted the searching for internships for the experience over the external factors. Therefore, some programs could potentially decrease in numbers if the findings of this study begin to be seen on a larger scales.

Potential students could see sport management programs as a means to a job after graduation. 63% of participants ended up in a career segment similar to where they completed their final internship. This could create an increased attraction among potential students searching for a major where they know they will have a better chance of landing a job directly after graduation.

**Limitations**

There are limitations associated with this research study that must be discussed. First, the fact that student internships differ are perhaps the most significant limitation of this study. As discussed previously in this study, each internship possess its own unique design internally and
externally. One student could secure a paid internship five minutes from their house, whereas another student could commute 30 minutes to an unpaid internship in a similar field. The student also has no control over the internship is set up internally. Of course, that is why the interview process is so crucial because students must ask the right questions in order to thoroughly understand the details of the internship. However, even with a thorough interview, an internship can still end up being something that the student did not expect or was not particularly satisfied with. As noted in the study, participant C explained how the majority of their Practicum was spent doing paperwork. Moreover, the industry the internships were completed in could have been a limitation in themselves. Students frequently take opportunities in areas, such as collegiate sports, professional sports, sports tourism, and sport governing body organizations.

There were threats to validity and reliability within the data collection instrument. Participants were graduates of the St. John Fisher College sport management department so possible bias could have occurred without the researcher knowing. Participants may have felt very positively about the internship structure at St. John Fisher College or there could have been some that had felt very negatively. The researcher did uncover some particularly negative responses during the data collection process, as well as instances where participants started and did not finish the survey. There were two cases where participants started the survey and stopped very early for an unknown reason.

A final limitation to the research was in relation to what employment area students ended up in after graduation. It should be noted that students may have already decided that they were going to enter the area where they completed their last internship no matter how their experiences at the position went. On the other hand, students could have decided that they were
not even going to work in sports well before even taking their respective internships. Therefore, the employment area where students ended up could be skewed.

**Directions for Future Research**

Future research should be considered when exploring internships in sport management fields because a majority of the research currently out is still very new. In regards to this study, researchers could work off this study by focusing on answering questions of why rather than what. For example, net changes in participant’s confidence, stress, and satisfaction occurred across Practicum and Internship. It would be beneficial for further research to be conducted on exactly why those values changed and then pass that information over to internship supervisors so a more effective experience can be provided.

An alternative method of data collection provides an opportunity to expand on this research. Interviews or focus group would be beneficial to assess trends, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of participant’s internship experience. Qualitative data is important for gaining the deep insight into a phenomena. Therefore, mixing this studies quantitative section with a latter qualitative section could prove to answer what and why changes occurred in participant’s mindset.

In future research, it could prove beneficial to use a slightly larger sample. Specifically, researchers may find it useful to study a larger sport management program so that there is the opportunity for not only more survey response, but more potential for qualitative analysis. A sport management program that has been around for more than two decades could provide a base of more participants to research, but also more current students to impact. After all, this research
could be helpful for freshman and sophomore sport management majors because it gives them a clearer picture of how previous students navigated internships and how they ended up.

**Conclusion**

In this research, we explored the several design factors that went into internships, the satisfaction levels accompanying both of their experiences, how their confidence changed, and what the participants did after they graduated. We learned that students who have a higher satisfaction with their final experience are more likely to end up in a field similar to their internship after the graduate. We learned that elements, such as task variety, learning opportunities, staff impact, and networking opportunities had a very high significance when relating to the overall satisfaction of the Internship. Moreover, we learned that students more confident after their Internship directly related to what area they ended up in after graduation. These are all meaningful discoveries for the area of sport management, but what people really want to know is why this information is important. There are several main reasons why this information is important, but what is comes down to is the fact that this research solidifies the success of the St. John Fisher College sport management department.

The lesson you can take away from this research is that even at first if your Practicum is not going the way you want it to, there is hope at the end of the tunnel. The graduates that came before you went through much of the same struggles that you are going through right now. Looking at this research can give younger sport management students confidence that everything will work out in a few years. No matter what semester you complete your two internships in, if your experience was paid or not, or if the internship was far away or right across the street, those elements truly did not matter. This research proved that it was about the quality of the experience and what you could take away from it. Some experiences are more valuable than others and that
is just the nature of internships. St. John Fisher College has provided a structured way to gain experience in the sports industry. When, where, and how you go about obtaining this experience has no substantial effect on the satisfaction of the experience. If students at St. John Fisher continue to ride the path set forth by the faculty and alumni then there will be a light at the end of the tunnel. Whether students end up in sports or not, there is a career out there for students who embrace the experiences that they gain during their internships and then enter the career segment that feels right for them.
References


Appendix

Figure 1

This survey aims to answer the following research question: In what ways did/does the internship experience at St. John Fisher College prepare you for a career that you are passionate about?

This survey contains 22 questions that will take approximately 8 minutes or less to answer.

There is minimal risk for involvement in this study. There are no direct benefits for participants nor compensation for this study. However, it is hoped that through your participation, I can better understand the impact of the internship experience. Furthermore, this study can potentially help St. John Fisher sport management faculty and students by providing valuable insight into past students experiences.

All data collected is confidential unless you choose to share more personal information. Responses will be reported collectively.

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at anytime or refuse to participate entirely.

Will you participate in this study?

○ Yes
○ No

The following questions will deal directly with the logistics associated with your internship experiences at St. John Fisher College.

What semester did you complete the 350 Practicum experience?

○ Fall ○ Spring ○ Summer

What semester did you complete the 480 Internship?

○ Fall ○ Spring ○ Summer

During your time selecting and completing your internships, did transportation ever play a role in your decision making?

○ Yes ○ No ○ Unsure

Which of the following best describes the compensation you received for your experiential placements?

○ Neither experience was paid
○ SPST 350 not paid, SPST 490 paid
○ SPST 350 paid, SPST 490 not paid
○ Both were paid
Q7. The following questions relate directly to your Practicum (SPST 380).

Q8. How would you have rated your confidence, in regards to your preparedness, entering your Practicum experience?

- Least confident
- Slightly less confident
- Neutral
- Slightly more confident
- Most confident

Q9. What was your stress level during your Practicum? Stress could be either directly in the work environment or take home stress related to the practicum experience.

- Very low
- Low
- Neutral
- High
- Very high

Q10. How would you have rated your level of confidence after completing your Practicum experience?

- Least confident
- Slightly less confident
- Neutral
- Slightly more confident
- Most confident

Q11. Briefly, please explain why your confidence changed?

Q12. How effective was your Practicum experience in preparing you for the remaining part of your education?

- Not effective at all
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

Q13. Briefly, what was the main factor that contributed to your response from the previous question?

Q14. How satisfied were you with your Practicum experience?

- Extremely dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Extremely satisfied
Internship Preparedness

**Q15**
The following questions relate directly to your internship (SPST 480)

**Q16**
What was your knowledge of the industry segment prior to completing your internship?
- Not knowledgeable
- Slightly knowledgeable
- Moderately knowledgeable
- Very knowledgeable
- Extremely knowledgeable

**Q17**
What was your level of confidence, in regards to your preparedness, entering your final internship experience?
- Least confident
- Slightly less confidence
- Neutral
- Slightly more confidence
- Very confident

**Q18**
What was your stress level during your internship? Stress could be either directly in the work environment or take home stress related to the practicum experience.
- Very low
- Low
- Neutral
- High
- Very high

**Q19**
How would you rate the amount of task variety that was provided at your final internship?
- Low variety
- Slightly lower variety
- Neutral
- Slightly higher variety
- High variety

**Q20**
How would you rate the level of impact that the staff had on you while completing your final internship?
- Very negative
- Slightly negative
- Neutral
- Slightly positive
- Very positive

**Q21**
How frequent were learning opportunities available to you at your final internship?
- Very infrequent
- Slightly infrequent
- Neutral
- Slightly frequent
- Very frequent

**Q22**
How frequent did you take advantage of networking opportunities (internally and externally to the organization) during your final internship?
- Very infrequent
- Slightly infrequent
- Neutral
- Slightly frequent
- Very frequent
Q23. What was the change in your confidence of that sports area after the internship was completed?
- Significantly less confident than when I started
- Less confident than when I started
- My confidence didn’t change
- More confident than when I started
- Significantly more confident than when I started

Q24. Briefly, what was the main factor that contributed to your response from the previous question?

Q25. How satisfied were you with your final internship?
- Extremely dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat satisfied
- Extremely satisfied

Q26. At the conclusion of your final internship, what kind of employment were you seeking?
- Employment in the sport industry segment where I completed my last internship
- Employment in a sport industry segment other than area where I completed my last internship
- Employment outside the sport industry

Q27. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The researcher is looking to conduct a follow up focus group sometime during late October. The focus group will be held on the St. John Fisher campus and take approximately one hour of your time.

- Yes, I am interested in participating
- No, I am not interested or I cannot make it to campus
Please select all that apply to your availability for taking part in the focus group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mornings</th>
<th>Afternoons</th>
<th>Evening</th>
</tr>
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<td>Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday and Thursdays</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturdays</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sundays</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Display This Question:
If you are open to completing this survey. The researcher is looking to conduct a focuses... Yes, I am.

Please fill out the necessary contact information

First and last name
Preferred email
Graduation year

Thank you for completing this survey. Please click the arrows at the bottom to officially record your responses.
Dear Participant:

My name is McQuade Milligan and I am Senior at St. John Fisher College. For my final research project, I am examining in what ways the internship experience at St. John Fisher College prepares you for a career that you’re passionate about. Because you are a graduate of the sport management program in the past 3 years, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the attached survey.

The following questionnaire will require approximately X minutes to complete. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any known risk. All responses will remain confidential unless you choose to share your personal information. Copies of the project will be provided to my St. John Fisher College instructor and the collective results shared with members of the campus community.

If you choose to participate in this project, please answer all the questions as honestly as possible. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time during the process.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected will provide useful information regarding how St. John Fisher College sport management students react to the internship process and how they feel about it after 1-3 years graduated from the program. If you would like a summary copy of this study please send me an individual email and I can send you a PDF copy to download and then print. My contact information is all listed at the bottom of the page.

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which this study is being conducted, you may report (anonymously if you choose) any complaints to my direct instructor whose contact information is also listed at the bottom of the page.

Sincerely,

McQuade Milligan

(716) 225-9010 & mtm02684@sjfc.edu

Dr. Emily Dane-Staples

edane-staples@sjfc.edu
Dear Graduate,

Last week a survey seeking your opinions about the internship process at St. John Fisher College was emailed to you. Your name was selected from the sport management database of recent graduates.

If you have already completed the survey, please accept our sincere thanks. If not, please click on the link below to complete the brief survey. We estimate that it should take less than 8 minutes to complete. Your response is important in helping us understand in what ways the internship experience at St. John Fisher College prepares you for a career that you are passionate about.

If you cannot connect to the survey using the link, please email me at the below address and we will send another format of the survey to you quickly.

Thank you for your help.

McQuade Milligan
SPST 499
St. John Fisher College
mtm02684@sjfc.edu
Figure 4

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to complete my survey. Your response has been used to determine the impact of internships on St. John Fisher College graduates. On December 12, at 10:30 am, I will be presenting my final poster about the research topic in the Colissano Gateway. You are welcome to attend this event and see how this project turned out. If you cannot make it to this poster session then a copy of this research project will be uploaded to the St. John Fisher College library page under the sport management section.

If you have any additional questions on this project or how your responses were used then please feel free to reach out to me via email or cell phone.

Thank you.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Practicum</th>
<th>Internship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence entering the experience</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress level in experience</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence after experience</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall satisfaction</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester of experience</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
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<tr>
<td>Practicum</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Most common response</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q18 – Internship Stress</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q19 – Internship Task Variety</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q20 – Internship Staff Impact</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q21 – Internship Learning Opportunities</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q22 – Internship Networking Opportunities</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Area Distribution</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment in the sport industry segment where I completed my last internship</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment in a sport industry segment other than area where I completed my last internship</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment outside the sport industry</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Table 5

**Chi-Square Analysis of Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internship Satisfaction</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence Entering the Internship</td>
<td>7.218</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internship Task Variety</td>
<td>27.101**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship Staff Impact</td>
<td>19.183*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship Stress</td>
<td>8.230</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internship Learning Opportunities</td>
<td>39.586**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internship Network</td>
<td>16.853**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester of Internship</td>
<td>3.033</td>
</tr>
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<td>Which experiences were compensated</td>
<td>4.953</td>
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</table>

**Practicum Satisfaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practicum Satisfaction</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practicum Stress</td>
<td>13.722</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which experiences were compensated</td>
<td>6.099</td>
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**Employment Area the participant ended up in**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practicum Satisfaction</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practicum Satisfaction</td>
<td>10.644</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidence After the Internship</td>
<td>14.797*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internship Satisfaction</td>
<td>8.921</td>
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</table>

**Practicum Effectiveness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence After the Practicum</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ values</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence After the Practicum</td>
<td>4.072</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation Factors</td>
<td>4.794</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Confidence After the Internship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of industry segment before internship</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of industry segment before internship</td>
<td>3.901</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Confidence After the Practicum**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester of the Practicum</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester of the Practicum</td>
<td>.266</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This table refers to the chi-square analysis that were run using SPSS. * $p<.05$ , ** $p<.01$*
Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Most common response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Did not play a role (84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>Neither experience was paid (47%)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 7

Why did your confidence change after completing your Practicum?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Bar Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful work</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned about real life</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

How effective was your Practicum at preparing you for the rest of your education?

- Slightly negative response
- Increased transferrable skills
- Increased network
- The actual work
- Confidence/comfort

The chart shows the distribution of responses to the question, with the majority indicating a slightly negative response.
Table 9

What was the main factor that contributed to a change in confidence after the Internship experience was completed?

- Increased network
- Staff had an impact
- The actual work
- Moving away helped
- Confidence/Comfort

![Bar Chart](Image)