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The Externship Experience: Developing a Short-Term Experiential Learning Opportunity to Enhance Career Development

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Abstract

Research supports experiential learning models, focusing on career exploration, as one of the best ways college students can clarify their interests and determine future goals (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). This capstone explored the existing literature on: fundamental career development theories, experiential learning's connection to career preparation, student populations needing additional career preparation, and ways to address these needs. Typically, sophomore students need but rarely receive this special attention, since they statistically have the highest withdrawal rates (Tobolowsky, 2008). This capstone project was conducted through a mixed methods pragmatic methodological assessment of the development and implementation of Merrimack College's Externship Experience. This program was developed to address the question of what can be done to address the needs of sophomores, in terms of career development, at Merrimack. Over winter break, 18 undergraduate externs were placed with 14 host supervisors at nine host sites. Consistent with the literature, externs expressed increased levels of personal confidence, career preparation, and interest in their chosen field after experience. Hosts also reported high levels of satisfaction with their experience, and all hosts reported that they would be interested in hosting a future extern. Recommendations from the first implementation were taken into consideration for the second round implantation (March), and will guide the development and expansion of the program moving forward. This capstone contributes to the understanding of population specific and career needs of college students, and offers an example of programming that can fill the gap in sophomore career preparation.

Keywords: career development, experiential learning, externship programming, sophomore preparedness

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The primary goal of many college students today is to prepare for a career after graduation. Typically in career centers, the most common request from students is assistance choosing and pursuing a major or career. Orndorff and Herr (1996) reference a national American College Test assessment, distributed decades ago, reporting this same issue, which is still a national concern across colleges today. The findings from the Orndorff and Herr (1996) article suggested observational and experiential learning models focusing on career exploration, are some of the best ways students can clarify their interests and determine future pursuits. From their qualitative analysis, the most commonly reported desire of students was the ability to shadow and observe professionals in occupations and industries, to assess if that particular field would be a good fit for them. This suggestion is rooted in career development theory, which describes students who have determined their career path, to have done so after actively taking the steps to learn about their personal values, interests, abilities, and learning styles as well as external occupations, industries, and economic trends (Orndorff & Herr, 1996).

Colleges and career centers today need to assess which groups need targeted programming, so all students are able to reach their career goals. Typically, sophomores, or second year students, are one of the groups that needs, but rarely receives, this special attention. Sophomores are at risk of falling through the gaps in career programming; although statistically sophomores have the highest withdrawal rates, their needs are still not being adequately served (Tobolowsky, 2008).

Interest development and career aspirations play a role in influencing any student's choice to participate in an experiential learning opportunity. Experiential learning, such as externships, internships, and co-ops, offer students an outstanding

opportunity to apply what they are learning inside the classroom to the real world. From a career standpoint, experiential learning provides valuable employment and professional experience, which prepares students to make their transition from college to work (Ruiz & Worrells, 2009). Employers place great emphasis on the importance of experience, and many professionals feel as though some of the essential work skills their employees need, can only be learned from personal experience (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006).

Experiential learning in the higher education setting is crucial to help students determine their goals. Students are only in the college-learning atmosphere for a few years, and need to make the most out of their educational opportunities. Because of this, many experiential learning opportunities have a career development focus, to prepare students for this transition out of college. They provide students with the opportunity to explore a profession or field before they commit to it ("Experiential Learning," 2013). Besides testing the waters of a certain industry, students are also gaining valuable work experience making them more competitive when they enter into the working world. In this project, I used a pragmatic methodology to study the experiences of students who participated in the first Externship Experience at Merrimack College, combined with a survey used to capture the experiences of the employers. This mixed method project allowed me to better understand the strengths of the Externship Experience program and areas for future improvement, in order to advance the career development of the college students at Merrimack College.

Literature Review

In order to better understand how participating in an experiential learning opportunity can increase a student's career preparation and success, it is important to

explore the existing literature addressing the fundamental career development theories,

how experiential learning connects with career preparation, which student populations

need additional career preparation, and possible ways to address the needs of these

populations. Once this understanding is further outlined, programs can be developed and

implemented into higher education institutions, ensuring that the career needs of all

students are being met. In this capstone project, I conducted a mixed methods assessment

of the first implementation of Merrimack College's Externship Experience. This program

was developed to address the question of what can be done in terms of career

development, for populations who need additional programming and support at

Merrimack.

Career Development Theories

Higher education institutions need to understand the importance of both the

theory and practice behind career development, in order to provide the most efficient and

meaningful career programming for students. Career development needs to be a

deliberate effort throughout a student's educational experiences. Gender, ethnicity,

ability, personality, socioeconomic status, and location are unique factors that play a role

in an individual's career development process (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Although there is

individual variability, the core of most career theories attempts to explain the same

process of how a person's work experiences evolve over time (Kosine & Lewis, 2008).

Similar to John Holland's theory of Vocational Interest, Kosine and Lewis (2008) cited

previous researchers findings that when an individual is satisfied in their work

environment, they will exhibit higher levels of commitment, competency, productivity,

and adjustment (Auty, Goodman, & Foss, 1987; Henderson, 2000; Mueller, 2003; Stott,

1970). Therefore, the right career can lead to a lifetime of satisfaction, good self-esteem, and high self-efficacy.

To reference a classic researcher, Jordaan (1963) explained how vocational exploration builds: autonomy, work-related skills and habits, developed awareness of interests and abilities, and a vocational identity of self-concept, which can be reapplied to future activities (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Erikson (1959), the renowned psychologist and psychoanalyst known for his theory on psychosocial development, referred to the inability of young people to develop an occupational identity to be a major speed bump in their overall identity development (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). This statement sheds light on how vital it is for higher education institutions to facilitate opportunities for students to explore and develop their career interests and identities. Identity development and vocational decision making are intimately related, resulting in individuals who have well developed career interests to also have a well a developed sense of self (see, e.g., Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989; Vondracek, Schulenberg, Skorikov, Gillespie, & Wahlheim, 1995; Weyhing, Bartlett, & Howard, 1984 cited in Kosine & Lewis, 2008).

Super's (1990, 1996) theory of career development addressed the vital influence that growth and exploration have on developing new knowledge, and how interventions can be used to align career development opportunities with an individual's interests (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Super's theory incorporated the idea that development continues and evolves throughout life, resulting in each new experience adding not only to a person's knowledge base but their sense of personal and career maturity as well.

The ties between vocational identity development and career decision making have been determined by both classic and contemporary researchers. In their article,

which related career development theory to career intervention programs for high school

students, Kosine and Lewis (2008) provided a thorough examination of the current

literature connecting these topics. They referenced current researchers' findings who

focused on specific populations such as African American, Latino, and adolescent

females in terms of identity development, self-efficacy, and engagement increasing

through career decision making and career exploration.

　　　　Vocational decision-making and development starts with interest development.

Hidi and Renninger (2006) developed a four-phase model of interest development, based

on existing research, which explains the interest development process and offers

educational implications based on this model. In their article the researchers referenced

how there have been repeated findings on the influence of a person's interests and their

ability and want to learn. They cited classic and contemporary researchers who supported

this connection, stating that "In self-efficacy theory an individual's beliefs about his or

her ability to produce successful outcomes and attain identified goals have been described

as critical to increasing achievement motivation and performance" (cited in Hidi &

Renninger, 2006, p. 112). They, along with many other psychologists, connect attention,

goals, and level of learning with an individual's interest.

　　　　The Hidi and Renninger (2006) article supported an educational intervention to

spark student interest development. Within their proposed model of interest development,

they referred to situational interest, where an individual's attention is focused and

triggered by something in the environment, and went on to explain how once this

triggered interest becomes internalized, by the individual, it can lead to continued interest

persistence, academic motivation, and higher levels of learning, which makes it

particularly relevant to an educational setting (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Based on existing empirical studies focusing on interest and learning development, Hidi and Renninger (2006) stated that the ability to have hands on experience and interactions with an interest leads to a deeper understanding of that subject. This knowledge development is one of the main goals of experiential learning programming.

Orndorff and Herr (1996) conducted a comprehensive study which compared declared and undeclared college students on career uncertainty and involvement, by surveying and interviewing 189 students from Pennsylvanian State University. Their findings addressed an interesting point about how many institutions are only meeting the needs of undeclared students through their programming. Through their research, Orndorff and Herr (1996) also examined the needs of declared students, who they determined are also sometimes uncertain or undecided about what they want to pursue as a career. Their findings show that these two populations have similar career needs, and challenges institutions to provide programming that will address the needs of both declared and undeclared populations and allow declared students to further explore career options as they relate to their major. Without this career exploration beyond major declaration, students may have a hard time envisioning and articulating how their degree will benefit them after graduation, and they may be less likely to matriculate to graduation without this ability.

Without the ability to articulate the transferable skills and experiences gained through pursuing a major, it is not surprising that up to 75% of students change their major at least once in college, and up to 80% of freshman have at least some career uncertainty (Kelly & White, 1993; Noel, 1985 cited in Orndorff & Herr, 1996). Career

exploration may help address some of the programming gaps between what is being learned in the classroom and what is being required in the work environment. Researchers have also suggested that the levels of uncertainty amongst declared, or first year college students, are at similar levels to those of undeclared students and students who have not taking active steps to become exposed to a potential career (Orndorff & Herr, 1996).

Students need to be supported in not only building competence in a subject, but also in sustaining their interest in that subject. Hidi and Renninger (2006) suggested that developing programming and experiences for students to develop their interest is the critical next step for educators. In their research on personal growth and exploration through career development, Kosine and Lewis (2008) similarly reported that students will show greater progress in transitioning into career roles, have a better sense of direction in their work, and have a greater sense of life satisfaction, if they have developed a genuine interest in their work based off of previous experience. Kosine and Lewis (2008) also emphasized the need for exploration activities and intentional career development efforts at the collegiate level, based on the emerging consensus that interest in occupations can increase students' motivation and engagement.

Experiential Learning

Career development focused experiential learning opportunities bridge the gap between what is learned in the classroom and what is happening in the community. One of the goals of experiential learning is to get students actively involved throughout their college experience. It is a great way to help students feel prepared for their chosen careers, and to acknowledge and address feelings of uncertainty before it becomes too

late. Typical learning outcomes for students participating in an experiential learning opportunity are increased levels of self-confidence in their communication, decision-making, and problem solving skills ("Experiential Learning," 2013). Students who do not develop these skills are at risk of feeling like they are ill prepared to leave college and start a career (Ruiz & Worrells, 2009).

The idea and importance behind experiential learning is not a new concept. In 400 B.C., Sophocles was quoted as saying, "One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it – you have no certainty, until you try" (Gentry, 1990, p. 9). Similarly, in 450 B.C., Confucius expressed, "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand" (Gentry, 1990, p. 9); and in the 20th century, John Dewey, an educational psychologist, referenced the impact experiential learning has on education by stating, "There is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education" ("Experiential Learning, 2013, p. 1). These philosophers and psychologists have laid the foundation for higher education today to implement "learning by doing" or "hands on learning" into their classrooms and career development programming.

The title itself, 'Experiential Learning,' depicts the importance of learning through experience. Colleges and universities today have acknowledged the powerful teaching and learning opportunities that experiential learning provide students, and are implementing these opportunities throughout different types of programs on and off campuses (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006). Educators need to constantly strive to prepare students for their future careers, and to offer experiences that will make them more marketable and competitive when they break into the job market after graduation.

The literature showed that students tend to learn more through the semi-structured

cooperative approach of learning through experience, verses the highly structured

classroom authoritative-teaching approach, which may trigger peer competition and lead

to disinterest ("Experiential Learning, 2013). Students typically have a stronger personal

investment in experiential learning opportunities, since they are tailored towards the

individual's declared interests. One of the most significant aspects of experiential

learning is that students take an active role in their learning experience; this is their

opportunity make decisions about their educational experience and choose the direction

of their learning. The "Experiential Learning" summary (2013), developed by the

Association for Experiential Learning, referenced to some experiential learning principles

(2011, p. 2):

1. Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by
   reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
2. Throughout the experiential learning process, the student is actively engaged in
   posing questions, assuming responsibility, being creative and constructing
   meaning.
3. The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience
   and learning.
4. Opportunities are nurtured for students and instructors to explore and examine
   their own values.

There are many types of experiential learning opportunities that can be applied to

most disciplines throughout higher education. The "Experiential Learning" (2013) and

Gentry (1990) articles listed some of the most common experiences: apprenticeships,

clinical experiences, cooperative education, externships, fellowships, field work,

internships, live cases, service learning, student teaching, study abroad, and volunteer

experiences. Throughout the different types of experiential learning, the key element is

always the student, specifically facilitating the student's interests, needs, and goals. When

describing the fundamentals of experiential learning, Gentry (1990) referred to this type

of experience as being "participative, interactive, and applied" (p. 20). These

opportunities allow exposure to a specific environment, process, or industry of interest.

Through experiential opportunities, learning takes place from both behavioral and

cognitive dimensions. Experiential learning allow students to have a hands-on,

collaborative, and reflective leaning experience which results in them feeling as though

they have gained new skills and knowledge (Haynes, 2007).

Based on previous empirical research and personal experience, Kolb and Fry

(1975) developed their own model for experiential learning, consisting of four elements:

concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of abstract concepts, and

testing in new situations (Kolb & Fry, 1975 as cited in McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006).

Testing knowledge through experience and applying new knowledge to change current

practices and ideas are the two most important aspects McCarthy and McCarthy (2006)

focus on from this model. In conjunction with these ideas, Wolfe and Byrne (1975) also

stressed the importance of collecting continuous feedback from participants both before

and after their experience (Gentry, 1990).

Researchers have found that this assessment and reflection of an experience is

critical for long-term understanding. The literature references that learning happens when

an individual observes an experience and reflects on the outcome of the process (Gentry,

1990). From the 43 responses of their online survey focusing on courses, communication,

and experiences surrounding professional development, Ruiz & Worrells (2009)

determined that career and professional development truly needs to be a focus at the

collegiate level for undergrads. Some of the issues that respondents identified as a focus,

in reference to professional development were employment trends and issues,

professional ethics, and the importance of internships and co-ops for career development

and employment preparation. Higher education professionals can start this development

by working with students through self-assessments, major and career exploration,

experiential learning, and career decision-making (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). Some of the

reported goals of career related experiential learning are to gain information about a

specific job or industry, build a professional network, talk to employers about industry

trends and opportunities, and gain experience to be better qualified for future experiences

(Orndorff & Herr, 1996).

　　　One of the problems that students face (especially when they are underclassmen)

is that they do not have the knowledge or experience that is required to make an educated

choice about a major or a career (Orndorff & Herr, 1996). Orndorff and Herr (1996)

quoted Moore (1976), who described the need for students to have exposure and

experience in a field before they can make an informed decision on whether to pursue

this field or not, asserting that:

> It became clear that most of the students who already had prospective career
> fields in mind had unnecessarily narrowed their initial career selections rather
> arbitrarily and haphazardly…Some had chosen their major simply because of the
> rapport they had with a particular professor. Or their parents, relatives, or some
> else had decided for them. Most of them knew too little about themselves…
> Virtually none of these students understood how to approach their career
> decisions strategically. (p. 2)

This quote addresses some of the external influences that affect a students' choices. Many

times students only have a shallow understanding of their career options, if they have an

understanding at all, which they have picked up along the way from outside sources.

　　　In order to develop the most appropriate programming, educators not only need to

understand the needs that students today face, they need to determine which populations

have the most significant needs. In 2005, 382 institutions participated in the National

Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Student in Transition survey, which

specifically targeted sophomore initiatives (Tobolowsky, 2008). Career planning and

major selection were the top two most common programming targets for these students.

      This focus on career preparation and development is most likely a result of

schools typically requiring students to declare a major by the end of their sophomore year.

Because of this demand institutions put on students, there is a need for targeted

programming around sophomore career development and decision-making (Tobolowsky,

2008). However before any student can feel prepared to make a decision, on either their

major or a career, they need to be aware of their interests. Experiential learning

opportunities facilitate this interest and career exploration, which is perhaps the most

critical aspect of sophomore year (Tobolowsky, 2008).

The 'Sophomore Slump'

      First-year-experience programs, which have been successfully developed in

colleges and universities across the U.S., have greatly benefited students and helped

improve retention rates because of additional aid and support focusing on the difficulties

many students face when transitioning from high school to college (Schaller, 2005).

Contemporary research has examined the development of second-year-experience

programs that address the specific needs and concerns of the students who make it past

their first year, and supports the idea that if first-year-experience initiatives are not

extended or monitored into the student's sophomore year, students will withdraw because

of lack of support and encouragement (Gump, 2007). This lack of resources negatively

affects students, and can lead to what educators refer to as the "sophomore slump."

The "sophomore slump" was first coined in Freedman's 1956 article *The Passage Through College,* and was referring to the college year that students reported being the least satisfied (Fisher, Raines, & Burns, 2011). Feldman and Newcomb (1969) reported similar findings, and added that this dissatisfaction was determined to be both with the institution and the students' personal college experiences (Fisher et al., 2011). Typically when students enter into the sophomore slump they are unmotivated, disengaged, and at risk of failing academically (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). This year is a time known for heightened emotional issues, because students seemingly feel abandoned after being coddled throughout their freshman year (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). Students are at risk of falling into this category if not offered adequate programming and support but their institutions.

Retention is a main concern of institutions, and a key reason for the additional need of support services for sophomores. Retention affects the institutions bottom-line but also the individual student's future college success (Fisher et al., 2011). As noted in Fisher et al. (2011), Astin (1977) reported that 85 percent of college drop-outs left in the first or second year of college. It is speculated by Flanagan (1991) that students from small private colleges are more likely to drop out between sophomore and junior year, contrary to the typical freshman-sophomore year drop-out rate of most institutions nationwide (Fisher et al., 2011).

Many sophomores experience anxiety and feel pressured during this year; some panic while others withdraw or begin to fail in response to the overwhelming reality of college (Fisher et al., 2011). Colleges and universities are finally beginning to take active steps to aiding sophomore students.

The Need for Additional Sophomore Programming

Although sophomore year is a significant year for students in terms of interest and career exploration and declaration, there is not typically an abundance of programming initiates focusing on this population. Traditionally colleges and universities place their focus on orienting new freshman students, getting juniors prepared to study abroad or start an internship, and helping seniors leave undergrad and enter their careers. However, sophomore college students tend to be overlooked by institutions and educators, even though they are possibly the ones needing the most help. Some researchers have noticed that the second year at college can be just as challenging, if not more so, than the initial year (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). In their investigation of factors affecting the academic success of sophomores, Graunke and Woosley (2005) suggested that this population has unique needs that are different from all other college grade levels. Although there is currently not a great deal of research on the sophomore year, this group of students is starting to attract heightened interest from educators and researchers (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006).

In their investigation of the current needs and efforts being made to support this population, Gahagan and Hunter (2006) quoted Douglas Richmond and Jay Lemonds (1985), who referred to sophomores as being "stranded in no-man's land" because of a lack of direction during this year (p. 18). Some important aspects of sophomore experience programs as described in Schaller (2005) include development of class unity; academic enrichment; mentorship from faculty and alumni; and career exploration and development.

Previous research has focused on two main concerns that need to be addressed in the sophomore experience. First, there are significant developmental challenges that take place during this year; and secondly, the amount of institutional support and programming that students receive during this year either significantly aids or hinders student success (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). As quoted in the Schaller (2005) article, Melissa, a twenty-year-old sophomore, stated: "I'm just kind of lost...as far as my friends, that's all challenging, my relationships with other people are challenging, my family life is challenging, my major's changed like five times" (p. 17).

The sophomore year is a crucial time in a student's development into adulthood. Out of Arthur Chickering's seven vectors of identity development, four (achieving competence, developing autonomy, establishing identity, and developing purpose) were found as both applicable and vital factors for sophomore year development (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). Gahagan and Hunter (2006) reported that many students claimed that they developed the most maturity and personal growth at college between their freshman and sophomore year, because of changes in their responsibilities, priorities, and self-management. Through her qualitative research with 19 traditional aged sophomores at a mid-sized Catholic university, Schaller (2005) found that the majority of students were ready to focus and define their college exploration during their sophomore year, and felt comfortable making decisions that would sculpt the direction of the rest of their college years and ultimately their futures. Although her sample of students were typically not ready to commit one hundred percent to a decision yet, this change in attitude shows how the second year of college is a crucial time for students to understand the impact of their choices and expectations from others (Schaller, 2005).

During her interviews and focus groups, Schaller (2005) determined that once students felt like they had a clear sense of direction, they were much more satisfied with their college experience and reportedly became more dedicated to their classes. Once students started to focus on one path, they were able to feel more in control of their options and take responsibility and ownership of their futures. Schaller (2005) commented on how students almost always report some level of anxiety until they are committed to a choice. Students have less doubt and more ability to block out extraneous or distracting options and choices once they are focused on a path (Schaller, 2005). Administrators do not want to stereotype every sophomore as being lost, but want to offer proactive programming and support for all students to avoid the sophomore problem from the start (Gump, 2007).

Based on the previous research investigating the specific needs and concerns surrounding sophomore students, it has been suggested that institutions need to create specific programs for this population to enable and encourage their major selection and career choices, in an attempt to increase success at their current institution. Graunke and Woosley (2005) conducted a study of 1,093 second semester sophomores at a Midwest public university via a survey, which examined sophomore student experiences and academic success. They suggested that sophomores are in a crucial stage of academic and career exploration, and state that when students are committed to an academic major, and ultimately a career, their level of satisfaction and grade point average increases. Other factors associated with the sophomores slump, such as engagement in the classroom and co-curricular activities, affect career development as well. By feeling more integrated,

whether it is through an externship or career development initiative, student goals, plans, and commitment to the institution are affected.

It is the responsibility of student affairs administrators to encourage active career exploration and field experience programs, but in order to facilitate students, institutions need to provide additional programming and support services (Schaller, 2005). Mentoring and individual attention should be the main focus of these programs, and can happen within the career services department (who typically facilitates career programming), from the faculty, or external host supervisor. Foci of sophomore year experience (SYE) programs, as previously referred to from the Schaller (2005) article, are determined to include academic enrichment, mentorship, and career exploration and development.

As cited in the Graunke and Woosley (2005) article, Gardner (2000) explained the dilemma that many sophomores face, and reported that sophomores claimed that declaring a major or committing to a career was the biggest personal problem they have. Since these aspects of college are determined to be vital to success, it is important for institutions to continue to develop support programs to foster exploration. Externships, for example, are a short-term commitment and allow for a quick turn around time for students to gain some of the knowledge needed to make these decisions.

Some sophomores report heightened levels of anxiety after leaving the safety net of freshman year (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Career exploration is just one example of programming that institutions can develop to help students ease into their sophomore year experiences. However, sophomore programming needs to go beyond career exploration for students to feel fully engaged and be successful in all aspects of their college life.

Colleges and universities also need to develop programming that addresses academic, personal, and social concerns of this population, in order to produce well-rounded students. These additional areas can be met through multiple facets such as sophomore focused living learning communities, extracurricular involvement, religious affiliations and engagement, etc.

Institutions may want to consider hiring additional mental health counselors, who are specifically focused on certain populations. This would provide sophomores with an additional support service, and would help address some of the unique personal and social issues sophomores face. Academically, educators may need to monitor sophomore students more closely. If they begin to notice a negative trend in a students' grades, forced remediation or meeting with an academic counselor may be able to fix the problem before it is too late. Helping students address and fix problems, before they feel as though dropping out is their only option, will help with retention rates in the long run.

Externship Programming

One example of experiential learning that can be targeted at sophomore career development is an externship experience. University and college career centers are constantly working to engage students, across all four years, in experiential learning opportunities, where they can utilize their classroom knowledge in a professional atmosphere. The Backman (2007) article supports the idea that all students should have the opportunity to have career related learning experiences, and argues that this is a valuable component of education that externships can satisfy. Law schools today are a great example of how having an externships or apprenticeships benefits students.

Backman (2007) goes as far as suggesting these experiences be mandatory, so that

students have first-hand experience in an actual practice so they can start to get

acclimated with the work climate. This type of observational experience is designed to

enhance a student's socialization to a specific profession and assist in developing career

goals (Paskiewicz, 2002).

Externship programs consist of anything from one-day job shadowing to a 3-week

placements at a host site, where students learn from a structured environment intended to

foster exploration of the professional world and the interests of the student themselves.

Paris and Mason (1995), as cited by McCarthy and McCarthy (2006), defined job

shadowing as,

> A work experience option where students learn about a job by walking through
> the work day as a shadow to a competent worker…Students witness first- hand
> the work environment, employability and occupational skills in practice, the value
> of professional training and potential career options. Job shadowing is designed to
> increase career awareness, help model student behavior through examples and
> reinforce in the student the link between classroom learning and work
> requirements (p. 47).

By talking with professionals that have successfully broken into the field, the shadowing

experience can facilitate a student's short-term and long-term goal achievement. Potential

outcomes of this type of experience, such as social interactions, dialogue, life-long

learning, and progression into graduate education could possibly lead to future internship

or co-op opportunities (Paskiewicz, 2002). In this way the shadowing experience can

complement their professional growth and accomplishments (Paskiewicz, 2002).

The Schaller (2005) article suggested this type of intentional programming for

sophomores, in an attempt to help get them focused on their path. These opportunities

enhance learning from both ends of the experience, in and out of the classroom (Schaller,

2005). Externships offer students the ability to be exposed to actual work environments, where they are able to get a better understanding of their field of study, rather than if they were just reliant on school-based knowledge (Luft & Vidoni, 2000). Having taken a class or having a degree in a subject does not necessarily prepare students for a profession. To be successful, students need experience to go along with the background knowledge they have gained from their classes. Based off of the feedback from a manufacturing job-shadow program, Frawley (2009) reported that students felt as though they have started to consider different career opportunities, begun to develop a professional network, and learned to apply their skills and abilities to a job after participating in an externship.

Backman (2007) stated that in order to involve the highest number of student participants, some schools offer summer externships, geographically diverse opportunities, and externships connected through a classroom component. Many schools offer academic credit for longer externships, this can be accomplished especially well if an externship is part of the requirement for a career class or SYE course. Backman (2007) goes on to address some of the common variables that result in students not being able to participate in an externship, including scheduling conflicts with classes or work, limited types of placements, and logistical placement problems. Some problems Backman (2007) describes in his article are a result of faculty-run externships. By offering externships through the career services center, some of the faculty stressors would disappear, since faculty rarely have the time or resources to coordinate externships themselves.

Guided reflection is an essential part of completing an externship experience. It allows the participant to analyze their experience, determine what they have taken away from this experience, and how they are going to use what they have learned in future

situations. Backman (2007) suggests that this type of reflection will help students align their experience with career goals, college learning objectives, and current circumstances. Schaller (2005) also calls for this type of required reflection to be used as a tool to help students identify what they have learned from these experiences, why they made certain choices, and what the external factors influenced their choices. By doing this type of examination, students are deepening their personal understanding and development.

Many colleges are recognizing the ample benefits of externship programs for students and employer relations, and are even starting to develop externship programs for their faculty members. Educator externships, similar to the University of Nevada's College of Education Educator Externship model created in 1996, are developed in order to help faculty members get experience in industry settings for a few weeks in the summer and bring their new knowledge back to their students in the classroom (Luft & Vidoni, 2000). As cited by Luft and Vidoni (2000), more than 80 percent of teachers have never actually worked in the field they are teaching about in the classroom (Bellsouth Foundation, 1999). After participating in these programs, both educators and students benefit from the experience and knowledge gained on site (Luft & Vidoni, 2000).

Whether a faculty member or student externship, participants reported gaining critical knowledge of employer-employee relations and in-office social skills and responsibilities (Luft & Vidoni, 2000). Schaller (2005) suggested that students should be made responsible for their learning, and encouraged institutions to engage their students in their own exploration of likes and dislikes and not leave it up to outside people like parents, counselors, or professors. This type of programming, especially when directed at sophomore students, allows on campus departments to implement programing that

addresses the concerns and needs for their students. One of the issues sophomores

reported as troublesome was finding the connection between what they learn in class and

what they will actually needed to know for their career. Externships offer the ability to

take knowledge learned in the classroom and apply it to real life situations, as well as to

take industry experience back into the classroom to facilitate more in depth discussions

(Luft & Vidoni, 2000). These programs offer the needed career planning experiences that

sophomore students require to be successful and satisfied.

The Externship Experience at Merrimack College

As the literature demonstrated experiential learning can be used to positively

impact the career development of college students. However, more needs to be

understood about how externships specifically impact the student experience. The

O'Brien Center for Student Success at Merrimack College has developed its own

externship program, called the *Externship Experience,* to meet the career development

needs of Merrimack students. This initiative was created to respond to the additional

career exploration and development needs of sophomore students in particular. This type

of program is aimed at getting students involved and interested in their career paths,

instead of getting lost in a transition year. The Externship Experience was built into the 4-

year plan that the O'Brien Center offers to help students stay on a continuously moving

career track while at school through career preparation and development (O'Brien Center,

2013).

The O'Brien Center offers career programming specifically developed and aimed

for each year of a student's time in college. Starting freshman year students are

encouraged to participate in such as Generation Merrimack, which helps first generation

college students build their professional network and exposes them to experiential

learning opportunities; Destination Exploration, which supports undeclared students

throughout their major and career decision making processes; and the Career Passport

Program, which allows business and writing students to participate in career related

events throughout the academic year (O'Brien Center, 2013). Juniors are typically

focused on obtaining industry work experience through co-ops and internships; and

seniors usually come into the O'Brien Center looking for job search help or need help

preparing for graduate school. In an attempt to offer more career programing for

sophomores, Generation Merrimack and Destination Exploration have been extended into

the students' second-year. However, the externship program is one of the first O'Brien

Center initiatives built and targeted specifically for second-year students.

The goal of the Externship Experience is to offer students the opportunity to

observe professionals on the job and gain insider knowledge of a certain career or

industry, through short-term work emersion. This type of experience offers students a

way to deepen their knowledge of a potential career path, gain marketable job experience,

and start to build their network of professional connections within their field. This

program is primarily targeted at sophomores in order to close the gap caused by the

'sophomore slump.'

Implementation

The first Externship Experience program at Merrimack College occurred in

January during the interim period between the fall and spring semesters, and the second

round of the program occurred during Spring Break in March. Although it varied between

host sites, the basic structures offered by the O'Brien Center included one-day job

shadowing, 5-day work week experiences, or 2-week full emersion (during January).

This was a no-credit experience, and students volunteered to participate in hopes

of coming out of their externship with valuable knowledge of an industry, deeper

understanding of their potential career path, and enhanced professional development

skills, similar to the learning outcomes of University Colleges and University of

Baltimore's Experiential Learning Programs ("Experiential Learning Student," 2013;

Externship Program, 2013). In order to participate, each student had to complete 'The

Winter 2013 Student Externship Application,' which is attached in Appendix 1. To help

students develop and articulate new skills, there was also a mandatory pre-externship

orientation similar to Vanderwall's (2012) pre-externship workshop, where students were

coached through workplace etiquette and important informational interview tactics, held

during the Fall 2013 semester. The orientation covered work place etiquette and

professionalism (i.e. how to present yourself, what to wear, what questions to ask hosts),

how to research an institution, and what to expect from your experience. After the

externship, students came back into the O'Brien Center to learn how to pitch this

experience to future employers; connect this experience to their personal interests, values,

and abilities; and determine the their next career moves going forward.

Marketing and outreach was conducted throughout the fall semester to recruit

students, faculty and employers to participate in this experience. Employers were

contacted through the Center's employer database, Advantage-Simplicity. Employers

were also recruited during on-campus career fairs and career panels. The employers who

expressed interest in hosting an extern were followed up with multiple times via email

and by phone to solidify their commitment and get their externship posted in the

Advantage system. Also, faculty from the different schools and majors at Merrimack

were contacted via email with information about the program, and in-person meetings

were held to further explain this program and its benefits for students. After hearing more

about the program, faculty members were encouraged to promote this experience during

advising and registration meetings with their students.

The Externship Experience was marketed throughout multiple social media

outlets and email blasts that Merrimack uses to get information out to students. Students

were also exposed to information about the program in classroom visits from an O'Brien

Center staff. In particular, sophomore students were targeted to participate in this

initiative, in an attempt to establish the Externship Experience as a stepping stone for

sophomores to participate in before they commit to a full internship during their junior

year. After students applied to the program they were hand matched with employers by

the O'Brien Center's Externship Managers, in an attempt to satisfied the needs and wants

of both students and hosts. Along with the Pre-Externship Orientation, students were also

required to sign a Participation Agreement, which outlined the externship placement,

participation policy, and no-show policy (See Appendix 2).

Method

The assessment of the program was completed through a mixed methods

pragmatic methodological paradigm in order to thoroughly examine the results of the

Externship Experience and develop best practices going forward (Mertens, 2009).

Surveys and interviews were conducted in order to gather more in depth understanding of

the externs' experiences. Participants were recruited from a comprehensive sample of all

students and employers who participated in the Winter 2013 Externship Experience.

After their externship, students were asked to complete an electronic survey evaluating

their experience (See Appendix 3). These surveys were aimed to assess participants'

satisfaction with their experience, knowledge gained through participating, and

suggestions for the future, similar to the Student and Host satisfaction surveys developed

at IUPUI for their Externship Program (Fall break, 2011). Employers were asked to

complete a similar survey after participation in order to understand how they perceived

their involvement in the Externship Experience and what learning objectives for students

were met through this experience (See Appendix 4 for Employer Post-Externship

Evaluation).

Externship participants were also recruited to attend a post-externship interview,

where they were able to provide a deeper reflective account of their experience, see

Appendix 5 for interview protocol. A limitation to note for the interviews, since I

developed the program, is that students may not have been 100% forth coming in their

feedback. The qualitative data collection, as a follow up to the survey responses, allowed

for better insight into the student's individual experiences. The interview took

approximately 30 minutes and attempted to assess what the student took away form their

experience as well as how they are going to use this experience to shape their future

career decisions.

Although both the survey and interview were mandatory from the perspective of

the O'Brien Center as part of the Externship Experience, participation to have this

information used as part of this study was completely voluntary. Both students and

employers who chose to participate were asked to sign an informed consent form

explaining the research purpose and goal. All personal identifiers were either discarded or

masked in the program assessment. Results of these assessments were used to assess the

success of the program overall, and used as guidelines to make the appropriate changes

for the second round of externships, which were held in March 2014.

Findings: Employer Surveys

Out of the 14 host supervisors from the nine host sites, who received the Post-

Externship Employer Evaluation, eight completed the evaluation (see Table 1, Employer-

Post Externship Evaluation Survey below for the breakdown of results). Appendix 6

outlines the nine externship host sites where students were placed. Out of the eight

supervisors who completed the survey, half reported their satisfaction with participating

in the externship experience was 'excellent' and the other half reported their satisfaction

with the experience was 'good.' The majority of externships were hosted for 1-day.

When asked if hosts would have benefited from any additional resources prior to their

externships, all eight hosts reported that they would not have. All eight supervisors that

submitted their evaluations reported that they were able to share their industry knowledge

and personal experiences with their externs during the experience. When asked if they

would be interested in hosting another Merrimack extern in the future, all eight

supervisors responded that they would be interested.

Table 1. *Employer- Post Externship Evaluation Survey*

Satisfaction with Externship Experience	N (%)
Overall Satisfaction	
Excellent	4 (50%)
Good	4 (50%)
Marginal	0 (0%)
Satisfactory	0 (0%)
Total	8 (100%)
Interested in hosting another extern	
Yes	8 (100%)
No	0 (0%)
Total	8 (100%)
Able to share knowledge and experience	
Yes	8 (100%)
No	0 (0%)
Total	8 (100%)
Externs showed professionalism	
Very much	2 (25%)
Yes	5 (62.5%)
Somewhat	1 (12.5%)
No	0 (0%)
Total	8 (100%)
Length of externship	
1 day	6 (75%)
2 days	0 (0%)
5+ days	2 (25%)
Total	8 (100%)
Needed additional resources	
Yes	0 (0%)
No	8 (100%)
Total	8 (100%)

I inquired about what were the most valuable parts of the experience for externs, and consistent with McCarthy and McCarthy (2006), who reported on the emphasis employers place on out of class experiences, most hosts responded that the most valuable aspect for students included seeing different types of careers and getting real-world experience in a field. One supervisor commented, "They both [hosted two externs] seemed to enjoy their time. One later offered her services as a volunteer and was really responsive to how creative working with this population can be." Another commented that the externship was a "good eye opener for available fields their [students] degree can be applied to and what a career in this field could entail." When asked about the

professionalism of externs, two of the supervisors reported that their externs were very

professional, five reported that they showed professionalism, and one reported that they

showed some professionalism. Most supervisors reported that there were no challenges

hosting their extern and had a positive experience with the externship program. A few

suggested students that students come with a little more preparation to ask industry

specific questions while on site.

Findings: Student Surveys

Out of the 18 students who completed an externship, 14 (78%) successfully

completed the Post-Externship Student Evaluation survey, see Table 2 below for survey

breakdown. When asked about their satisfaction, externs reported to either have had

excellent satisfaction (64%) or good satisfaction (36%) with their experience. Consistent

with Hidi and Renninger's (2006), who supported interventions similar to the externship

to develop a deeper understanding of a subject, the majority of externs either agreed or

strongly agreed that this experience enhanced their understanding of their field of

interest. All participants were able to identify skills and abilities needed to be successful

in this field, and almost all participations reported that they would recommend this

experience to their peers.

Table 2. *Student- Post Externship Evaluation Survey*

Satisfaction with Externship Experience	N (%)
Overall Satisfaction	
Excellent	9 (64%)
Good	5 (36%)
Marginal	0 (0%)
Satisfactory	0 (0%)
Total	14 (100%)
Recommend experience	
Definitely	13 (93%)
Probably	1 (7%)
Maybe	0 (0%)
No	0 (0%)
Total	14 (100%)
Experience enhanced understanding of field	
Strongly Agree	6 (43%)
Agree	5 (36%)
Neutral	2 (14%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	1 (7%)
Total	14 (100%)
Applied classroom knowledge	
Strongly Agree	4 (29%)
Agree	6 (43%)
Neutral	2 (14%)
Disagree	2 (14%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)
Total	14 (100%)
Host provided knowledge of field	
Strongly Agree	9 (64%)
Agree	5 (36%)
Neutral	0 (0%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)
Total	14 (100%)
Helped evaluate career path	
Strongly Agree	5 (36%)
Agree	6 (43%)
Neutral	3 (21%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)
Total	14 (100%)
Identified needed skills/abilities	
Strongly Agree	7 (50%)
Agree	7 (50%)
Neutral	0 (0%)
Disagree	0 (0%)
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)
Total	14 (100%)

Findings: Student Interviews

Out of the 18 externship participants, 17 students completed the post-externship interview; a majority of the externs were sophomores, along with a few freshmen and one junior. Externs had a range of majors, but the most common was engineering. Follow up interviews were largely consistent with surveys.

Externship impact.

There was a long list of responses for the most impactful aspect of this experience in terms of career development, however the most common response was gaining hands on experience, followed by actively participating in programs and tasks, relating to site supervisor, gaining professional confidence, and confirming that this career was truly for them. At the end of one of the interviews a student commented, "If I didn't do the externship I probably would not have known [career goal] yet, but I just know what I want to do now."

When asked why they were interested in participating in the externship experience, findings were consistent with Orndorff and Herr (1996)'s qualitative analysis explaining how career development starts with actively pursuing interests and potential occupations, most students responded that they wanted to get hands on experience in their field. One student stated, "I think it was great because it gave me an idea of what I am going into before I go and get a degree I spent four years on, and then maybe what if I didn't like it? It gave me an idea of if I would really enjoy it." Multiple other students reported that they were using the externship experience to explore or narrow down their career options, as supported in the literature of Kosine and Lewis (2008). Two

participants are changing their major because of their externship experience. One of these students explains his reasoning for changing:

> My major *was* mechanical engineering, but actually because of the externship I realize that that is not something that I would like to do so I switched to computer science…well while I was there I just realized as I shadowed them around and saw some of the elements of their day I realized that that isn't something I really want to be doing everyday for the rest of my life.

As stated by this student, the Externship Experience can be successfully used to either convince students they are on the right path or realize they need to reassess their options .

Connections to major and career path.

Almost all students in the study commented that their placement aligned with their major and career aspirations, and just a few used the experience to explore a different career than their current major declaration. Consistent with Orndorff and Herr's (1996) goals for career related experiential learning, most externs talked to professionals about their daily tasks, participated in hands-on projects, toured the facility, and shadowed their host through meetings and a typical day while at their host sites. One student commented, "I got to see how rewarding it was [to be a physical therapist] and how it made her [host] happy, and I just feel like that is something that I want to do."

Multiple students reported that this experience has helped them solidify their career path, whether that is what they are currently pursuing or changing into. Similar to the extern feedback from Frawley (2009), other common responses were that this experience increased their understanding of the field/industry and provided a perspective that they have not received from their classes. In reference to some advise passed on by their host, one extern commented, "What you learn in the classroom is 30% and the other 70% of your job is on the job training."

During their interviews, most students reported that they were able to associate how the position they shadowed related to their major. During one of the interviews, an extern stated, "It was awesome. Just to see how the field really does work, and what you're actually going to apply your knowledge to." Some students reported that they received more information from this experience then they get from in-class work, while others reported that this experience has motivated them to focus more in class so they will feel prepared to enter the workforce post-graduation.

Along with the general information students received from being in a professional setting, externs were also able to observe the individual qualities of their hosts. Although there were a variety of externship placements, ranging from engineering technology to disability services, students reported that they were able to recognize skills and abilities needed to be a successful professional in their particular field. Some of the most common responses were patience, passion, organization, communication, and professionalism.

Almost all participants reported that their host supervisor was helpful in explaining the daily responsibilities and requirements of their career, which aligns with "Experiential Learning" (2003) experiential learning principles. A few happily reported that their hosts gave them specific suggestions in terms of knowledge and skill development that need to be pursued outside of class that will set them apart when applying for jobs and others reported that their hosts explained their own education and career path while at the site. One engineering student is planning to petition the engineer department to develop a one-credit course that will teach a specific type of technology used regularly in the field, which is not currently included in the Merrimack curriculum.

Consistent with the learning outcomes for this experience, externs express significant increases in preparedness and understanding in their career decision-making process. For many externs this experience greatly increased their confidence level, one reported, "I definitely want to stay in this field now, now I am concrete convinced that I am doing that I want to do." This finding is consistent with the learning outcomes outlined by the "Experiential Learning" (2003) summary, including increased confidence and feelings of self efficacy. All participants either reported that their experience made them more likely to pursue their field of interest or that their experience was useful in refining their career path. One student who was using this experience to test out a different major commented, "So after the first day [of the externship] I went right home and emailed Sarah [career advisor] and was like what are the steps I need to do to change my major because I'm in this. I really want to do this now…I was so excited!"

When asked about next steps in career development, most students reported that they are planning to get some type of internship or longer experience in their field, pursuing a higher level degree post-grad, and taking targeted classes suggested by their host supervisors to help them have a well rounded understanding of the field. These continued exploration activities are outlined by Kosine and Lewis (2008), and typically keep students motivated to move forward with their interests.

Perception of externship.

When asked about the program from a logistical point of view (orientation, communication placement, etc.), externs reported that they benefited from the information provided via the orientation and externship packets provided through the O'Brien Center. Most also reported that they felt prepared going into their placement and

knew what to expect. One student stated, "I felt very prepared walking right in, I felt very prepared I felt like Ok I know EXACTLY what I'm going to do." In terms of timing of the externship, multiple students reported that running this program over winter break was extremely helpful.

When asked to summarize their experience, most students spoke about how great their experience was. One student commented, "I feel that it gave me great insight to how it could be if I did this job and I was just speechless. It was just an amazing opportunity and experience to be able to do." Similar to the findings from the survey evaluation, most students stated that they would recommend this experience to their peers. In response to this question, one student answered, "Yes, this was incredibly useful in seeing how this was actually done in the field verses in the classroom." Similarly another student commented, "Yes. It helps to either rule something out or to gain more interest in a certain field." Additionally, one student gave insight to the specific populations that this experience would benefit by saying, "I loved it. I think that everybody should do it. I think that every freshman, or you know anyone here, should just go out and try their job before they decide to get a degree in it."

Before concluding the interview, students were asked if they had anything additional to add about their experience. Most students spoke about how even though they were just there for a few days, this experience helped them become better prepared, which aligns with the goals of most career development opportunities (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). One student commented, "I definitely think that it made me realize that if I can focus and really do the stuff in the classroom that it is definitely the job that I want to be

doing." A few others commented about how they really appreciated being able to see the daily functioning of a job, one stated:

> I thought it was a good way to get insight into the field…the things I saw and learned were things that I'm not going to get by reading a website or a pamphlet. This is hands on. I got to see first hand everything that happened on a normal day.

One other student was offered a future engineering internship with the company he visited for his externship, suggesting that the program can be a meaningful stepping stone to a longer term and more engaged experience.

Areas of improvement.

Although most participants reported that there was no 'least valuable' part of their experience, there was a slight trend in responses of having some difficulty understanding or relating concepts because a lack in upper level class exposure. These comments were widely expressed from the freshman participants, so continuing to promote this experience to sophomores may benefit externs. Although not consistent with the general perception of the placements, a few externs reported that they would have benefited from a better placement-interest match while others wished their externships lasted a little longer because they had such a positive experience. However one student who expressed this also commented, "I think that I could apply this advice no matter what I decide to do, even if I don't do into management, so I thought that I got some great advise either way."

In terms of overall perception and feedback received from both externs and hosts, the first round of externships were successful in addressing the outcomes and goals of this program. Through their Externship Experience, students expressed increased levels of personal confidence, career preparation, and interest in their chosen field after

participation. In particular, this experiential learning opportunity has addressed and increased sophomore career programming, and has been a successful tool in aiding in the self-awareness process especially for major changers. Hosts also reported high levels of satisfaction, and because of this positive experience the O'Brien Center now has the opportunity to work with these hosts on this and other career related initiatives moving forward.

Recommendations

One of the biggest challenges in executing the Externship Experience was obtaining employer buy in and commitment. For the next iteration of this experience I would recommend that the new Externship Manager, who will be a full time O'Brien Center staff member, start employer outreach earlier in summer and go in person to meet and recruit employers. By having this face-to-face contact, the Externship Manager will be able to clearly articulate the level of commitment and preparation that is required to host an extern. From my experience, it was much easier to recruit externship hosts in person during on campus career fairs than it was via email or phone.

Moving forward, the Externship Experience will be expanding. Currently the program has operated by a manual process, since employers and students were hand-match behind the scenes prior to the externship, this type of matching system will not be able to be sustained with the program growth that is expected. In line with Backman's (2007) suggestions of making experiential learning externships mandatory for students, the O'Brien Center for Student Success submitted a request with the President and Deans, to require all students at Merrimack to complete an Externship Experience within their first three semesters of school. This is great news for the center, since this will drive more

students into our office and for students who will now be gaining additional experience as undergrads. This being said, the personalized placement of student with employer in the current program will have to change in order for every student to participate.

Additionally, continuing to host an hour-long orientation for all students will be challenging with this type of growth in the program. I have been brainstorming ideas on how to get this vital Pre-Externship information to students in a convenient and time-sensitive way for both the O'Brien Center and students. I think that the best way to get this information to students would be to provide an online e-learning model that students can watch from home. This would have to be more generalized and would ideally include a short quiz at the end to make sure students understood the main points of the module. This video will have to be developed and tested this summer by the new Externship Manager in order to roll it out for next Fall 2014. I envision the video would include many of the elements of the Pre-Externship Orientation such as, how to prepare for your externship (initial email introduction with host, how to research host and site, preparing elevator speech about self and career interests, etc.), how to be professional upon arrival (arriving on time, how to dress, questions to ask hosts, etc.), and how to stay connected after the externship (building a network, thank you letter to host, connecting on LinkedIn, etc.)

Finally, although we worked hard to provide best matches for both employers and students, it is important to mention that there should be a continued effort to find the most relevant hosts for students so that they are getting the most out of their Externship Experience. A few students brought up the fact that although they benefited from their experience in terms of professional growth and preparation, that they wished they were

matched with a host that was more aligned with their interests. In some cases matching

students and their interests is impossible because of confidentiality issues and

background check requirements of the employer, for example when trying to place

students with federal agencies. However the Externship Manager should continue to be

continuous of matching students with the best host and clearly explaining the reasoning

for each match and what the student will take away from their experience if they choose

to participate. Even when students' majors are not completely aligned with their match, I

believe that as long as the Externship Manager can articulate what skills the student will

be able to take away from this experience the student will still be interested in

participating and have a positive externship.

Conclusion

In terms of meeting the learning outcomes that were outlined for Merrimack's

Externship Experience, I believe that this was a successful first implementation. The

majority of students reported that they felt prepared to go into their externship, that this

experience helped solidify their areas of interest, and increased their career path

confidence. Many schools are starting to offer opportunities similar to the Externship

Experience at Merrimack in order to provide students with the necessary foundation to be

successful post-graduation ("Experiential Learning," 2013). The Merrimack Community

has taken this a step future and is working to make it a requirement that all students

participate in this program to ensure that every student is getting some type of out of class

experiential learning opportunity while in school. As the literature suggests (McCarthy &

McCarthy, 2006), this out of class experience is immensely beneficial to student success

and career preparation by making students more marketable and competitive.

By targeting the sophomore population, I was able to build and implement a career development stepping stone that helps bridge the gap between the first-year experience course during freshman year and participating in an internship during junior year. As previously stated by Tobolowsky (2008) the sophomore slump happens because there is typically not targeted programming surrounding this second year population across the board. Over 70% of externship participants were sophomores who wanted to get experience before they entered into the second half of their college experience without any out of class knowledge. To increase the level of sophomore satisfaction and success, institutions should continue their effort to offer specialized programming that allow this population to discover more about themselves and their career interests. The unique issues that sophomores face deserve and call for additional programming and support services from institutions.

Since students are only in a focused college-learning environment for a few years, it is crucial that institutions offer opportunities for students to grow and explore their interests and for students to take charge of their college experience and pursue these opportunities. After examining the current empirical research on experiential learning benefits and receiving such positive feedback from the student participants, externship supervisors, and the O'Brien Center and Merrimack as a whole, I feel confident that the Externship Experience will to be a strong career development initiative at Merrimack in the future. Moving forward, it will be beneficial for Merrimack to examine best practices for placing students with externship hosts and expanding externship locations beyond who they already have connections with. It is also important to be consistent and streamline the process for students who find their own externship placement sites. In

general, future research on ways to get students involved in their interests in more

challenging fields, such as therapy or other fields with high confidentiality and

background requirements, will help expand experiential learning opportunities for

students.

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Appendix 1

Externship Student Application- Winter 2013
Online Application through the O'Brien Center for Student Success Advantage system.

Name [auto fill]
Student ID # [auto fill]
Email [auto fill]
Phone number
        [textbox]
Class Year
        Freshman/Sophomore/Junior/Senior
College Major
        [pick list of Merrimack Majors]
College Minor
        [pick list of Merrimack Minors]
Are you a first generation college student?
        Yes/No
Preferred method of communication
        E-mail/Phone
Externship Experience-Please give us insight as to why you would like to participate in
        this program?
        [text box]
Learning Outcomes- What personal experiences, skills, values, or knowledge would you
        like to learn from your host?
        e.g. Career advice, industry trends, skills needed for this field, etc.
        [text box]
Preferences- Do you have any preferences regarding a specific externship?
        Do you have a preference of a one-day, 5 day, or 2 week placement?
        [text box]
Occupation or Interests
        [45+ option pick list]
Co-Curricular Activities and Achievements- What activities or hobbies do you participate
        in?
        [text box]
Provide any additional information here that will help us match you with an appropriate
        externship host.
        [text box]
Resume- In order to participate we must have a current resume on file. Please follow the
        link and upload.
        [attachment upload]

Appendix 2

Winter 2013 Externship Experience Student Participation Agreement

Information
Student Name: _____ ID #: _____

E-Mail: _____ Phone: _____

Major:_____ Minor: _____

Organization Name: _____

Participation Policy
If you are selected to participate in the Externship Experience, you are expected to complete your externship.

To cancel an externship, candidates must contact the O'Brien Center and their host site least 2 business days (48 hours) before the scheduled start date. Failure to do so can result in the candidate being marked as a 'No-Show' and their ADVANTAGE account being temporarily locked.

If you cannot make your externship because of some unforeseen circumstance, you must inform both your host site and the O'Brien Center (leave a phone message at 978-837-5480 or email us at careerservices@merrimack.edu) by 8:30 a.m. on the day of your externship to say that you will not be able to come in. If you fail to do so, your Advantage account may be temporarily locked until you meet with a member of the O'Brien Center for Student Success Staff.

No Show Policy
The no show policy applies when a student does not appear for their scheduled externship and/or when a student does not cancel at least two business days before their start date.
The student will:
1. Notify the O'Brien Center as soon as possible so the recruiter can be notified.
2. Meet with an O'Brien Center staff member to discuss the reason for the missed externship.
3. Author a letter of apology to the company recruiter with a copy also sent to the Assistant Director of Employer Relations.
 * The O'Brien Center has the right to deactivate your account until the above conditions are met which will make you ineligible to participate in future employer related programs.

Student Extern Policy Acknowledgment Form
By my signature below, I indicate my understanding of the above terms and conditions, and willingness to conform to, the professional standards of the externship program. I acknowledge that I have received instruction about my externship placement and appropriate behavior while at my site, by the O'Brien Center for Student Success. I acknowledge the responsibility of representing not only myself but the Merrimack Community as a whole.

Name (print): _____

Signature: _____ Date _____

O'Brien Center Career Advisor: _____ Date _____

Appendix 3

Student- Post Externship Evaluation Survey

Thank you for participating in the Winter 2013 Externship Experience. The goal of this experiential learning opportunity is to give students a chance to explore a major, industry field, or organization future. This survey gives you an opportunity to evaluate the program as a whole and what you have taken away from this experience. If you have any follow up questions, please contact Alexandra Finney at finneya@merrimack.edu.

1.) Overall, what is your satisfaction with the Winter 2013 Externship Experience?

Marginal   Satisfactory   Good   Excellent

2.) Would you recommend this opportunity to other Merrimack students?

No   Maybe   Probably   Definitely

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

3.) After participating in this experience, you have a better understanding of this field.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

4.) You were able to apply classroom knowledge to this experience.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

5.) Your host was helpful in relaying knowledge and information about the field.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

6.) This opportunity was helpful in evaluating a particular career path.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

7.) You were able to identify skills or abilities needed to work in this field.

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

8.) Please describe what you enjoyed most about participating in this experience.

9.) Please describe what you found to be particularly challenging during this experience.

10.) What suggestions do you have to improve the externship program?

11.) Please provide any additional comments about this experience.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation. You will be contacted by the O'Brien Center to set up a time to come in for your follow-up meeting.

Appendix 4

Employer- Post Externship Evaluation Survey

Thank you for hosting a student through Merrimack's Externship Experience. This opportunity helps students explore majors and careers and is an important step in their decision-making process. We hope that you found this experience to be to be rewarding and successful and look forward to potentially working with you again as a host for other Externs.

We would really appreciate your feedback on this program and your experience. Your responses will help guide the next round of the Externship Experience, in order for it to be successful for all involved. If you have any follow up questions, please contact Alexandra Finney at finneya@merrimack.edu.

1.) How many externs did you host? _____
2.) How long was your Externship Experience?
1-day   5-day   Two-weeks
3.) Overall, what is your satisfaction with the Winter 2013 Externship Experience?
Marginal   Satisfactory   Good   Excellent
4.) What do you think the student(s) thought to be the most valuable part of this experience?
5.) Were you able to share your industry knowledge and personal experience with your extern(s)?
6.) Did the extern(s) show professionalism and interest during their time with you?
7.) Were there any challenges that you dealt with while hosting your extern?
8.) Would you have benefited from more resources or training as an externship host?
9.) What can we do to improve on the Externship Experience in the future?
10.) Would you be interested in hosting another Merrimack Extern in the future?
Yes   No
11.) Are you interested in learning more about other ways to partner Merrimack College?
Thank you for participating in this experience and taking the time to complete this evaluation.

Appendix 5

Student- Post Externship Interview Follow Up

1.) What is your year in college?
2.) Can you tell me why you wanted to participate in the Externship Experience?
3.) Did this externship placement align with your major or career aspirations?
4.) Please give me an overview of where your Externship placement was and what your experience was like.
5.) What activities did you participate in/observe while at this site?
6.) Do you feel as though your perception of this career has changed after participating in this Externship Experience?
7.) Are you now able to associate how this position relates to possible majors?
8.) Are you able to recognize what interests, abilities, and skills are needed to be successful in this career? Please explain.
9.) Were you able to connect your own interests, abilities, and skills with this experience?
10.) Was your host supervisor helpful in explaining the responsibilities and requirements of this career and how they got to where they are?
11.) Please explain how this experience made you less or more likely to pursue this type of work as a career?
12.) What was most impactful aspect of this experience in terms of your career development?
13.) Please explain what was the least valuable part of this experience?
14.) What is your level of confidence in your choice of career path going forward?
15.) What are the next steps you are planning to take in your career development?
16.) Is there anything else you would like to add about your Externship Experience that I did not ask? Is there anything about the program itself that we can improve upon?

Appendix 6

<u>Externship Host Sites</u>

EMARC
- For almost 60 years, EMARC's mission is to support, serve, and advocate for people with developmental disabilities and their families to ensure they are valued, respected and have the opportunity to fully participate in their communities.

Medford Police
- The mission of the Medford Police Department is to create a proactive policing partnership with its residents by providing quality policing services through community involvement. And our police department's WEB site has been designed to provide quality informational services to the general public and to promote good community relations.

MITRE
- The MITRE Corporation is a not-for-profit company that operates multiple federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs).

Peabody Essex Museum
- The mission of the Peabody Essex Museum is to celebrate outstanding artistic and cultural creativity by collecting, stewarding and interpreting objects of art and culture in ways that increase knowledge, enrich the spirit, engage the mind and stimulate the senses.

Petucket High School
- Regional high school in West Newbury Massachusetts.

The Prescott House
- Part of Genesis HealthCare — one of the nation's largest skilled nursing and rehabilitation therapy providers. The Prescott House offers short-term care for patients who need rehabilitation therapy to return home quickly and specialized care for dementia or Alzheimer's residents.

Rebar and Mesh Inc.
- As an independent WBE-certified fabricator serving New England and Eastern NY, we are able to maintain close contact with our customers and provide the service & flexibility needed in today's marketplace. From our state-of-the-art estimating and detailing systems, to our thermal transfer bar-coded tagging and production systems, we are equipped to provide the fastest, most efficient and accurate service from the start of the project to the end.

Teradyne
- Teradyne (NYSE:TER) is a leading supplier of Automatic Test Equipment used to test semiconductors, wireless products, data storage

Weston & Sampson Engineers
- Weston & Sampson is a full-service environmental and infrastructure consulting firm with nearly 400 professionals, all committed to excellence in their chosen fields.