QEP Proposal for McNeese State University

Internships: The Key to Post-Graduate Success

Executive Summary

Employers value a four-year college degree, many of them more than ever. Yet half of those surveyed recently by The Chronicle and American Public Media's Marketplace said they had trouble finding recent graduates qualified to fill positions at their company or organization. Nearly a third gave colleges just fair to poor marks for producing successful employees, and they dinged bachelor's-degree holders for lacking basic workplace proficiencies like adaptability, communication skills, and the ability to solve complex problems.

Once upon a time, 'trainee' was a common job title. Employers today expect everyone, recent graduates included, to be ready to go on Day One. As a result, the responsibility for preparing the work force has been passed to higher education.

The reason for this major shift in workplace expectations, in summary, is this. As the baby boomer population leaves the work force, employers need to fill the vacuum left behind quickly, and they no longer have time to offer traditional on-the-job training programs for new employees. Instead, they seek experienced new hires who are ready to begin work on their first day of employment, and who have the basic knowledge needed to accept responsibility and solve problems with minimal training and oversight. The responsibility for providing career-related experience is thus shifted to educational institutions.

The most effective way to accomplish the objective of producing students with four-year degrees AND related experiential learning is via required internships. Internships are the missing link between the classroom and the workplace.

Issue to Be Addressed

Goal: To increase the competitiveness of McNeese students in post-graduate success through extensive professional development. Experiential learning offers the atmosphere necessary to gain knowledge and experience in a chosen profession, provide enlightenment on a prospective future, develop a professional network, cultivate self-awareness and self- assurance, increase success when applying to graduate and professional schools, and develop an understanding of local, national, and global communities. Collectively, experiential learning provides a professional edge to McNeese students creating the key to post-graduate success.

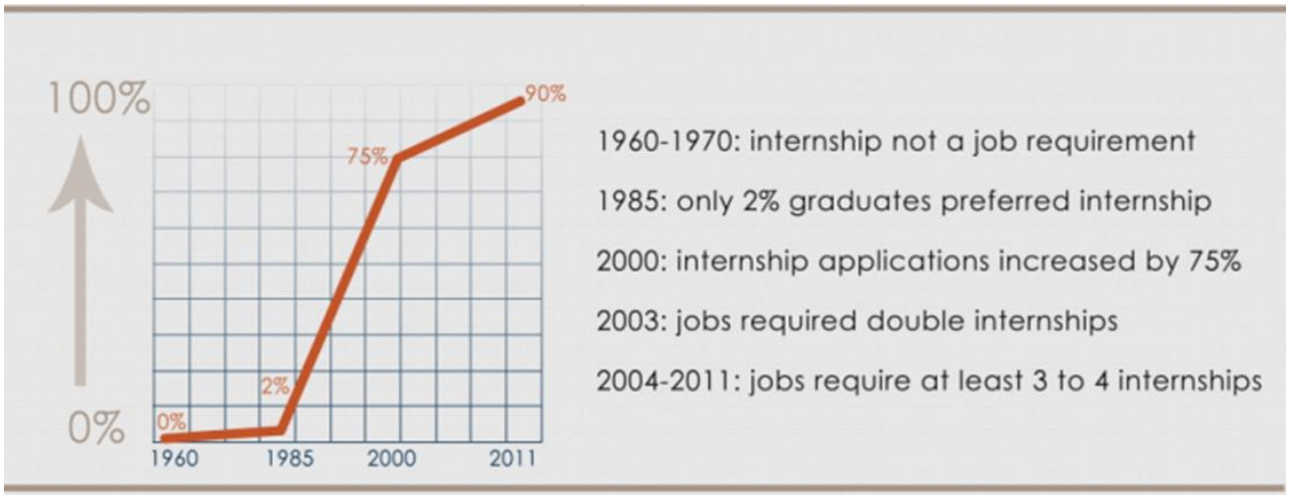
Background:

As of Prior to 1985, very few employers hired interns and on-the-job training was common, with new employees considered as trainees for 6 weeks to one year. As the Baby Boomer population has aged and is now leaving the workforce, taking years of experience and expertise with them, they leave behind a vacuum in the workforce, which employers have difficulty filling. As a result, on-the-job training time has greatly diminished and employers value students who are graduating from college with career-related experience. In short, employers need new hires who are able to accept responsibility and solve problems starting day one. This need has been the driving force behind the drastic increase in the number of internships available in the job market. As students have completed internships, the value of the experience, as well as the professional development and networking opportunities has emerged as the missing link between the classroom and the workplace, and interns consistently report a deeper understanding of how concepts and principles learned in class apply in the workplace. Additional value is added for students who are able to get a realistic preview of their chosen

profession, which either confirms their choice, or reveals misperceptions and allows time for the student to adjust professional goals prior to graduation.

2011, almost 95% of employers surveyed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers sought new graduates who held at least three to four internships during their course of study.

Below is a visual representation of the trend showing the increasing requirement and necessity of having completed one or more internships prior to graduation.



Source: National Association of Colleges and Employers

I. Define Experiential Learning:

Experiential Learning includes a range of external experiences that help students gain experience and understanding in their field of study prior to graduation.

a. **Internships** - are structured, supervised, and short-term programs in which undergraduate or graduate students perform tasks and duties within an entity, internal or external to the university in order to gain knowledge and experience in their respective field of study. The internship is usually performed over the course of one semester, or during a summer or winter break. The student may or may not earn monetary compensation from the company and/or academic credit from the university. Internship programs should benefit both the student and the organization. (as stated on the McNeese website) At McNeese, internships are subject to departmental academic approval, and requirements for academic credit are determined by the respective discipline.

b. **Practicum –** a course of study designed especially for the preparation of clinicians that involves the supervised practical application of previously studied theory.

c. **Clinicals/Preceptorship** - A clinical experience in which a nursing student is participating in the provision of care for one or more clients and a nursing faculty member is not providing direct supervision on site. A preceptorship agreement is required when nursing faculty are not providing direct supervision.
Student Teaching – Education majors observe classroom instruction or performs closely supervised teaching in an elementary or secondary school prior to graduation.

d. **Co-op** - Co-op students on the job are traditionally given projects commensurate with their experience and academic level and are supervised by experienced engineers or technicians. Students gain the opportunity to evaluate their choice of profession and the options within that career field. (as stated on McNeese website)

e. **Service Learning** - a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.

II. QEP Options

a. Internships only
b. Internships and other experiential learning (i.e. service learning, practicums, student teaching, clinicals, co-ops)
c. Internships, other experiential learning, and study abroad

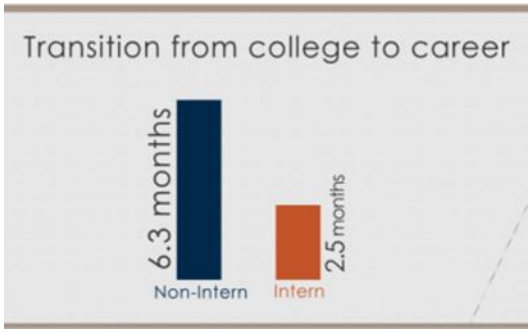
Project Purpose

I. Why Experiential Learning:

a. The rate of internship growth across the nation is steadily increasing and rapidly becoming a standard for post-graduate employment and graduate school applications. According to Internships.com, 56% of companies plan to hire more interns in 2014 which is up from only 48% in 2013. On average, 67% of the graduating classes of 2013 completed one internship, which was up six percent from 2012 and 32% of the 2013 graduating class completed two or more internships, which was up 14% from 2012.

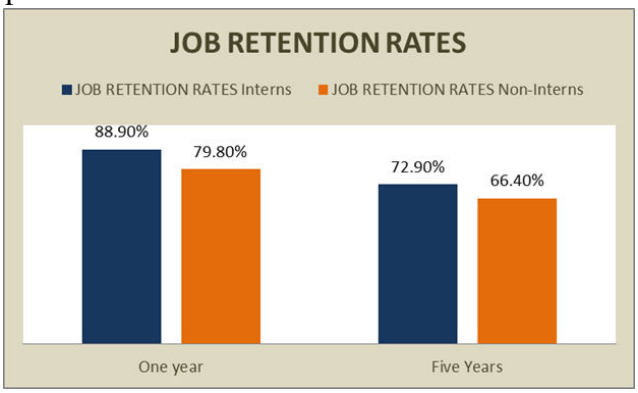
b. National Data (NACE)

- Length of time to employment - In 2011, the average job search time for non-interns was 6.3 vs. 2.5 months for graduates who had completed one or more internships.



- Starting salary: According to The Class of 2014 Student Survey Report published by NACE, the median starting salary offer for students who did hold an internship was $37,277 in comparison to students who held a paid for profit internship earning a median offer of $54,304 and those with paid federal internships earning a median offer $52,852.

- Retention on the job - The average one and five-year retention rates for employees with intern experience were also significantly higher versus retention rates for those without internship experience.



c. Local Data

- Presently, over 300 employers have worked in affiliation with McNeese to hire a student for an internship or co-op.
- McNeese Strategic Plan: Objective 1.g. Significantly increase the percentage of McNeese Students who are engaged in career – related internships prior to their graduation.

d. Employer expectations

- According to NACE, an obvious positive correlation exists between an increased chance in getting a full-time job offer and a student having held an internship during their course of study. Graduates who have held an internship or co-op experience that apply for a full-time position were more likely to receive a full-time job offer and also receive higher compensation.
- According to NACE, in 2014 52.1% of job applicants that held an internship or co-op received at least one full-time job offer, while 38.6% of applicants those not having held an internship or co-op received at least one full-time job offer. Creating a difference of 13.5%.

e. Grad School expectations

- Internships can help students meet admissions criteria for graduate school Many highly regarded graduate schools, such as the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas, require on-the-job experience prior to admission. In addition, Bentley University, a leading private business school, mandates that all master's candidates complete at least one internship prior to officially applying during their senior year of undergraduate studies. The internship should have been held in the students designated bachelor's degree field and been at least three months in length.

Expected Outcomes

I. What Could Happen – Success Stories

a. **Connecticut College** has implemented internships as a required course for graduation. By doing so, they have achieved astounding results. Connecticut College reports that one year post graduation, 96% of alumni are employed or enrolled in graduate school and five years post-graduation 97% are employed or enrolled in graduate school.

b. **Longwood University** requires internships for all students prior to earning a Bachelor degree; students intern worldwide during the summer.

c. **Butler University** requires all business students pursuing a bachelor's degree to complete two internships while at or above the junior level of study. The internships are mandatory for graduation and are required to be at least three hundred hours in the perspective discipline in which the student is enrolled. Butler views internships as a resource that gives its students an edge over the competition when seeking full-time employment upon graduation.

The recent increase in the number of private universities requiring internships or experiential learning for all students is interpreted as the beginning of a national trend toward required internships as students and employers realize the benefits and internships become a required component of a competitive resume in the job market.

Project Methods

I. Implementation

a. Personnel

- The **University Intern Coordinator** will serve on the leadership team and participate in developing strategic goals, objectives, and initiatives for the Office of Career Services and Internships, providing leadership for the design, implementation and assessment of the employer development strategic plan. In conjunction with cross-functional teams, based in academic colleges, the Coordinator will build and strengthen relationships with internal and external stakeholders, including employers, alumni, faculty/staff, and other academic units. As the employer partnership mode is built out, the Coordinator, in collaboration with respective academic areas, will be responsible for hiring and supervising a team of Career Success Coaches.

- The **Career Success Coach** in each College is responsible for developing and administering career programs and services for undergraduate and graduate students, as well as alumni for their respective academic area(s). The incumbent will be responsible for the development and implementation of a career development program, including career appointments, recruiting, career fair opportunities and special events for the students within the area, and will work with the University Internship Coordinator to develop internship opportunities for students.

b. **Course Description** – Professional Edge Course: One hour course to be required for every student when they earn 60 hours. Meets weekly for 15 weeks. May or may not count toward Bachelor's degree. Academic credit is determined by each college. Each college develops discipline specific content within the following framework.

c. Course Content

- Career paths (discipline specific)
- Internships/Experiential Learning
- What is an internship/clinical/practicum, etc.?
- Advantages of an internship
- What to expect of an internship
- How to search for an internship
- Resume, Cover letter, References
- LinkedIn Professional Profile
- Networking: How to build a professional network, and how to benefit
- Interview Skills – behavioral, Skype, structured
- Recent grads, young professionals as speakers

Organizational Structure

I. **University Internship Coordinator** located in the Office of Career and Student Development with shared supervisory responsibility for Career Success Coach in each college. Responsible for overall coordination, implementation, and assessment of university internship program.

II. **Career Success Coach** embedded in each college – dual reporting structure – Career Services/College Dean

a. Maintain familiarity with academic programs in the College
b. Become familiar with students and possible career paths for each discipline served
c. Serve as employer liaison for College
d. Serve as recruiting event coordinator for students in their assigned College

e. Instructor for Professional Edge course
f. Student organization liaison within the College