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# A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education

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A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education


by


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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in
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**Dedication**

My faith in God has truly sustained me throughout this journey and without Him, this achievement would have never been possible. To my husband, Benjamin Grant Johnson, for loving me unconditionally and for supporting me every step of the way. Your patience and humor have been just what I needed to continue on this path. I love you to pieces! To my parents, Bobbie & Alfredia Williams, for your continual love and support. With a grateful heart, I love and honor you. To my aunt and friend, Dr. Elaine W. Bryant for believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself. Your prayers, encouragement, and support mean more to me than you will ever know. I love you much!

My family and friends, as a whole, have fostered unwavering love and support throughout this process and for that, I am eternally grateful. God has good plans prepared for my life and I honor Him for His faithfulness!

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information you shared, and the encouragement you provided. It's my hope that you find this

work informative and beneficial as you continue to strive toward excellence!

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**Abstract**

A single case study was used to examine internships at an (AACSB) accredited business school located at a Research 1 university in the southeastern United States. Internships are the dominant form of experiential learning used within the college under study and the "preferred method of business schools worldwide to give students practical experience and help them transition to the real world" (Kosnik, Tingle, Blanton, 2013, p. 616). The Grant University College of Business, pseudonym selected for this case, supports an internship and career services office that oversees nine internship courses representing six departments within the college. At minimum, each department is responsible for outlining their individual internship guidelines and requirements. The staff within the internship & career services office are primarily responsible for enforcing those guidelines, administering course content, and working with employers to promote meaningful internship experiences. The dean, associate dean for undergraduate programs, six administrators, six employers, and five students participated in this study. After three months of interviews, a focus group, and document reviews, data were analyzed to determine participant perception of internships and also to gain insight into future recommendations. This study was significant because it sought to address a gap in the literature on internships in undergraduate business education and to provide additional evidence that internships contribute to success in career, curriculum, and relationship development as evidenced by the in-depth analysis of a single case.

## Chapter One: Introduction

**Background of the Problem**

Since the founding of The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania in 1881, undergraduate business education has seen tremendous growth (Wharton, 2016). By 1924, 117 colleges and schools of business existed, and by 2011 that number grew to more than 13,000 (Fernandes, 2011; Hayes & Jackson, 1935).  During the 2014-2015 academic year 363,799 undergraduate business degrees were conferred making business one of the most popular degree programs in the nation (Kensing, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a; USA Today, 2016). Today, the "world's largest business education alliance - AACSB International" (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) reported that more than 990,780 undergraduate students are enrolled in one of the 789 AACSB-Accredited business schools worldwide (AACSB, 2017, para 1). Growing enrollment rates, expanded degree opportunities, record numbers of degrees conferred, and the widening view of business education as a profitable business entity all demonstrate the popularity of the discipline and its impact on society (Pfeffer & Fong; 2002).

Along with these successes came concerns from industry professionals accusing business schools of not teaching the right skills and for graduating students that lack the essential knowledge to succeed in the workforce (Jamison, 2010; Wilhem, 2002; Yucelt, 1998).  Efforts to address these concerns took shape as early as the 1950s with scholars citing complacency, narrow curricula, a disproportionate shift toward research, and a neglect in developing student

skills as major concerns plaguing the undergraduate business education environment (Dalton, Earley, Hitt, & Porter, 2009; Gordon-Howell, 2009; Porter & McKibbin, 1998).

Founded in 1916, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), was instrumental in addressing these concerns and improving higher education for business worldwide (AACSB, 2016; Hayes & Jackson, 1935). In a 2006 report, AACSB identified the need for business schools to modify their curriculum and to work alongside industry professionals to meet the needs of the global workforce (Shuayto, 2012). Jones (1984) found that the faculty within business schools often determine course content and research areas; however, critics believed that this system has the potential to hinder the development of the students being served. Mahmoud, Frampton and Prentice (1975) argued that input should also be gathered from employers, the business community, and graduates if the goal is to produce alumni poised with the skill set for the rigors of today's business world.

**Problem Statement**

In 1999, the *Business-Higher Education Forum* produced a report that identified the following eight characteristics as necessary for success in high-performance jobs: leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, time management, adaptability, analytical thinking, global consciousness, and basic communication (Jamison, 2010). According to Tanyel, Mitchell, and McAlum (1999), attempts to address these skills in higher education have fallen short due, in part, to politics and conflicting ideas among faculty that sometimes cause the business environment to change faster than the university curricula. In addition, a disconnect exists between student and employer perceptions of soft skill competency (Stewart, Wall, & Marciniec, 2016). Robles (2012) defined soft skills as people skills and other personal characteristics that

employers consider necessary for employee success.  Both students and employers agree that soft skills are important. Yet students are entering the workforce with increased confidence in their abilities while employer expectations remain unmet (Stewart, Wall, & Marciniec, 2016). Scholars agree that a perceived skills gap exists and it must be addressed to maximize graduate success in today's global workforce (Beard, Schwieger, & Surendran, 2008; Stewart, Wall, & Marciniec, 2016).

Historically, business schools have primarily focused on preparing students conceptually, theoretically, and philosophically to excel in business, government, and social sectors (Hodge, Proudford, & Holt, 2014). While some universities prioritize research from their faculty, it has overshadowed other areas of development in some of the more elite business schools across the country (Hodge et al., 2014).  With this knowledge comes a gradual shift in the priorities of business education to identify skills employers seek, ensure that curriculum is regularly re-examined, and take employer satisfaction into consideration to keep up with the rapidly changing corporate environment (Beard, Schwieger, & Surendran, 2008; Eisner, 1999; Hodge et al., 2014).

To address the problem, some undergraduate business schools have incorporated forms of experiential learning into the curriculum to help close the skills gap (Caulfield & Woods, 2013; Grair, 2007). Experiential learning has long been described as the process of *'learning by doing'* (Kolb, 2015; Rizk, 2011) and is defined as any form of learning that allows the learner to put theory to practice (University of Texas at Austin, 2016; University of Colorado Denver, 2015). Examples of experiential learning include internships, co-ops, service learning, practicums, undergraduate research, laboratory activities, design projects, cultural immersion programs, apprenticeships, and other creative activities that provide opportunities for students to learn while doing (Moore, 2010; University of Colorado Denver, 2015).  What distinguishes

experiential learning from traditional education is the focus on the process of learning as opposed to the outcome of learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). Clark and White (2010) argued that an experiential learning component is essential for any university business education program to thrive and produce quality results. Internships, co-ops, and service learning are perhaps the most common forms of experiential learning; however, internships are the dominant form of experiential learning used within the college under study and the "preferred method of business schools worldwide to give students practical experiences and help them transition to the real world" (Kosnik, Tingle, Blanton, 2013, p. 616).

Internships, informed by experiential learning, provide students with an opportunity to explore career options while determining likes and dislikes without sacrificing a significant amount of time (Rothman & Sisman, 2016). As students investigate jobs, they are also able to reflect on their personal needs and interest thereby aiding in their ability to narrow potential career options (Rothman & Sisman, 2016).  Many scholars note that internships can clarify job interest; inform students of employer expectations; enlighten students on what they can expect from the job; and assist students in reflecting on whether or not a particular job will be a good fit both personally and professionally (Hiltebeitel, Leauby, & Larkin, 2000; Lord, Sumrall, & Sambandam, 2011; McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006; Rothman, 2007; Moghaddam, 2011). Rothman and Sisman (2016) found that internships have become such a prevalent component of undergraduate education that many scholars believe participation should be mandatory for students enrolled in business schools (Devine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007; Hiltebeitel, Leauby, & Larkin, 2000; McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006; Rothman & Sisman, 2016; Templeton, Updyke, & Bennett, 2012). Alon (2003) noted that several skills are developed as a result of experiential learning including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical

thinking. Internships also help students (a) produce stronger resumes, (b) perform better on job interviews, (c) enhance networking skills, (d) gain academic credit, (e) obtain job offers quicker than their peers, and (f) obtain higher starting salaries (Coco, 2000; Divine et al., 2007; Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010; Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002). Bennis and O'Toole (2005) found that business school graduates are not receiving enough training in the skills necessary to compete in the labor market. Thus, internships present a viable option to help learners develop skills that generate new ideas and prepare graduates for successful careers.

The nation is facing a "skills imperative" that threatens the U.S. economy and our ability to see competitive growth (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010, p. 9). Therefore, business schools must understand how to use internships and other forms of experiential learning to cultivate the skills, competencies, and values to produce the next generation of leaders (AACSB, 2016). When implemented correctly, internships can improve skills and "solve a variety of other workplace issues while offering mutually beneficial outcomes for students, employees, and employers" (Smith, 2015, para 1). Graduating a large volume of students is simply not enough to meet the demands of a changing workforce (Kavas, 2013).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to describe, analyze, and draw conclusions about internships in undergraduate business education at an AACSB accredited business school at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States. More specifically, this research identified the role, challenges, benefits, and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education. By identifying these areas, I gained a better understanding of how one form of experiential learning, internships, can impact the curriculum, the professional preparation of the students, and the relationships that are created through internship program development.

**Research Questions**

Grant University is the pseudonym that was assigned to this institution and the following research questions were used to guide the study.

1. According to administrators and employers, what is the role and structure of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University?

2. According to administrators, employers, and students, what are the benefits and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University?

3. Based on the perspectives of administrators, employers, and students what are the challenges of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University?

**Conceptual Framework**

To investigate the three research questions identified, it was important to understand the theories that helped to guide this research. I adopted a constructivist orientation to learning. Constructivism represents a wide range of perspectives while asserting that we *'construct'* our own meaning rather than meaning being discovered (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). True meaning emerges when human consciousness engages with objects (Crotty, 1998). Constructivists also believe that meanings are both subjective and objective. Paul and Mukhopadhyay (2005) notes that, unlike the positivist era that dealt primarily in scientific knowledge, constructivist take values into consideration. The constructivist perspective is evident in multiple theories of learning; however, I used the following theories to assist in my analysis and interpretation of the findings: contextual teaching and learning, situated learning, work-based learning, and cognitive apprenticeships. In the following sections I described each theory individually and how they relate to this inquiry.

**Contextual Teaching/Learning.** Contextual teaching and learning (CTL) uses eight interrelated components to help students make meaning of and retain course material (Johnson, 2002). By using this process, students are able to determine the viewpoints that people seek while developing steps to give meaning to the context that has been discovered (Johnson, 2002). Johnson (2002) defined the process as follows:

> The CTL system is an educational process that aims to help students see meaning in the academic material they are studying by connecting academic subjects with the context of their daily lives, that is, with the context of their personal, social, and cultural circumstances. To achieve this aim, the system encompasses the following eight components: making meaningful connections, doing significant work, self-regulated learning, collaborating, critical and creative thinking, nurturing the individual, reaching high standards, and using authentic assessment (Johnson, 2002, p. 25).

The eight components of contextual teaching and learning assisted in my understanding of how administrators and employers structure internships and my interpretation of the role they have in student development. More specifically, students in the Grant University College of Business have the option to receive academic credit for their internship experience through enrollment in an online internship course. When viewed through contextual teaching/learning, students are able to make meaning of their academic preparation by reflecting on the relationship between the internship and their course material. Internships involve an integration of the eight components of contextual teaching/learning. Therefore, a thorough understanding of this theory was essential in my understanding of how students make meaning of course material, how they create new

knowledge, and how administrators and employers design internship experiences to meet the needs of all stakeholders involved.

**Situated Learning.** Situated learning is a "social-cultural process" (Zhang, Kaufman, Scheell, Salgado, Seah, & Jeremic, 2017, p. 3) centered around making gradual connections within communities that later lead to full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) posit that the connections we make within the community demonstrate how important our environment is in our ability to create new knowledge. They believe that learning is a naturally occurring action deeply rooted within activity, context, and culture (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning shifts the learning process from an individual focus to a participatory focus (Quay, 2003). "Of prime importance in situated learning is the conceptualization of the intimate connection between participation and the social and cultural world within which that participation occurs, a viewpoint often missed in many models of learning in experiential education" (Quay, 2003, p. 107). Situated learning theory provided an essential framework to analyze the structure of internships at companies that recruit Grant University College of Business interns. I also gained insight into how employers engage interns in the social, cultural, and professional life of the organization.

During an internship, students make connections with mentors, supervisors, and potential colleagues. Employers make connections with potential employees and administrators make connections with industry professionals able to provide professional opportunities for the students they serve. The process is cyclical and as these connections are made, they continually demonstrate the value of situated learning by showing how important our communities are in our ability to create new knowledge.

**Work-based Learning.** Work-based learning often refers to work that occurs in a place of business resulting from a need to resolve a workplace issue (Lester & Costley, 2010). It overlaps with experiential learning, but is not the same, and is frequently informal in nature (Lester & Costley, 2010). Much of the learning received in the workplace is outside the scope of what higher education institutions traditionally engage; however, when planned and organized it has the capacity to gain value through university involvement (Lester & Costley, 2010). When institutions and employers work together, work-based learning provides an opportunity to create a space for the development of new learning opportunities in the workplace (Boud, Solomon, and Symes, 2001; Roodhouse, 2010). To achieve this goal, institutions will often view work-based learning as a field of study receiving formal accreditation as a university course (Costley, 2001; Roodhouse, 2010). According to Boud, Solomon, and Symes (2001), work-based learning programs in higher education typically share the following six characteristics:

- A partnership between an external organization and an educational institution;

- Learners are actual employees of the organization;

- The work performed at the organization is the curriculum;

- Current competencies and desired learning outcomes are identified before the learner begins the process;

- Projects and assignments take place in the actual workplace; and

- Institutions assess the learning outcomes based on a pre-established framework accepted by both the institution and the employer.

Organizations that commit to work-based learning partnerships are typically larger and make a great investment of time and resources to ensure the development of its employees (Boud, Solomon, & Symes, 2001). This type of learning demonstrates a key example of how

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academia and industry work together to ensure that learners gain skills, credentials, and wages to help them succeed in the labor market (Rodriguez, Fox, & McCambly, 2016). Lester and Costley (2010) found a "growing body of evidence to indicate that work-based learning of various kinds is effective in increasing adult participation in higher education and in developing the capability of individuals and organizations" (p. 567). Therefore, work-based learning provided an ideal framework to analyze how the Grant University College of Business and intern employers work together to overcome challenges and increase the benefits and intended outcomes for both students and employers. When industry and education work together, new knowledge has a platform on which to emerge.

**Cognitive Apprenticeship.** The cognitive apprenticeship is a method of teaching the learner different ways of thinking about the activity they are involved and its associated skills (Brandt, Farmer, & Buckmaster, 1993; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). According to Brandt, Farmer, and Buckmaster (1993), "cognitive apprenticeship is a vehicle for tapping the knowledge and experience of adults who have found ways to effectively handle the tasks, problems, and problematic situations in the current era" (p. 69). Cognitive apprenticeships are often demonstrated using a 5-phase process: modeling, approximating, fading, self-directed learning, and generalizing (Brandt, Farmer, & Buckmaster, 1993). According to Brandt, Farmer, and Buckmaster (1993), the 5 phases include the following characteristics:

- Modeling: the learner observes a real-life activity in totality in order to verbally articulate the action;
- Approximating: requires the learner to perform the activity while receiving support and coaching from the instructor;

- Fading: the learner becomes more independent while feedback from the instructor is minimized;

- Self-directed learning: the instructor provides assistance only when asked and the learner takes the initiative to present the activity alone or in a group within a specified time frame deemed appropriate to the situation; and

- Generalizing: the instructor and learner discuss the new skill and the learner is then encouraged to use it in new situations.

# Constructivist Theories of Learning
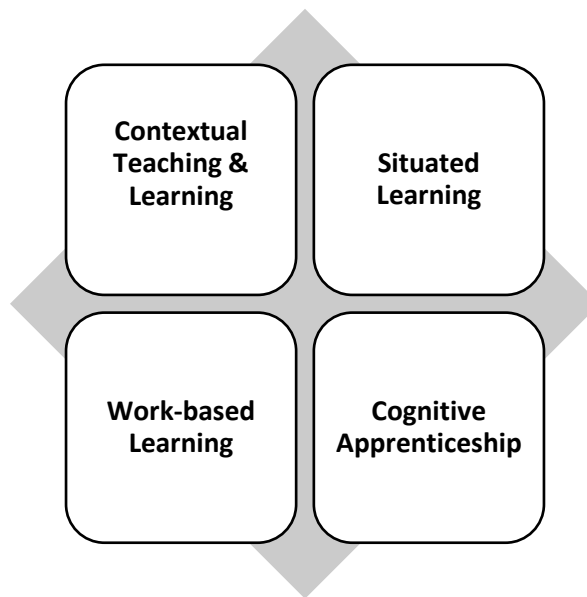


**Figure 1**. Constructivist Theories of Learning

According to Brandt, Farmer, and Buckmaster (1993), what makes cognitive apprenticeships so powerful is the focus on "learning how to learn" (p. 77), the interaction of the learner with a knowledgeable instructor, and the responsibility of the learner to verbally articulate their thoughts. The cognitive apprenticeship model demonstrates how important

supervisors are in the learner's ability to understand and articulate new skills. Structured internships have the ability to provide a platform for students to engage in this 5-phase approach to learning. Therefore, when executed correctly, it often produces knowledge that could not be realized in a traditional classroom setting.

**Summary.** The findings that I gathered from my research participants and my own thoughts as the primary research instrument served as the foundation for the development of my understanding of the role, benefits, and challenges of internships in undergraduate business education. Together, I developed a clear understanding of how administrators and employers structure internships; gained insight into how employers engage interns into the social, cultural, and professional life of the organization; analyzed how schools and employers work together to overcome challenges and increase the benefits and intended outcomes for both students and employers; and better understood the role that intern supervisors have in the intern's ability to appreciate and articulate new skills.

By viewing internships in undergraduate business education through the lens of each theory described, I was able to recognize the importance of creating meaning from concrete experiences and understand why a focus on the process of learning is central in our ability to positively affect the outcome of learning. The tenets of these theories also help me to form the foundation of the study in my selection of data collection procedures (interviews, focus groups, document reviews) and the formulation of interview questions. When there is a better understanding of how learners create knowledge, business educators may have a better understanding of how internships can enhance the curricula, decrease the skills gap, and produce graduates that satisfy the needs of our growing labor market (Griffis, 2014; Tanyel, Mitchell, & McAlum, 1999). In sum, contextual teaching and learning, situated learning, work-based

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learning, and cognitive apprenticeships assisted in my ability to conduct a scholarly inquiry into the research questions that were identified.

**Significance of the Study**

Internships have long been considered the "dominant form of experiential learning in business schools worldwide" (Kosnik, Tingle, Blanton, 2013, p. 616). Yet, little research exists on the use of internships in an AACSB accredited business school at a research 1 institution in the southeastern United States. This study was significant because it sought to address this gap in the literature and provide insight into the role, structure, challenges, and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education.

The current state of internships in undergraduate business education was the heart of this study. My intentions were to describe, analyze, and draw conclusions about internships in this space. Therefore, the administrator and employer insight united with the student perspectives brought about other unique aspects of internships that might otherwise remain unknown. The results provided details that other undergraduate business schools could use to enhance an existing program or develop a new.

Most current studies on internships in undergraduate business education lack an in-depth analysis of an individual program. By using a single, qualitative case study, this research capitalized on analytical descriptions of the context of a holistic program while providing a more comprehensive understanding of internships in undergraduate business education.

**Positionality Statement**

To better understand the actions and findings of this study, it was necessary to identify my values, assumptions, and biases. I have worked in higher education for 15 years with 11 of those years in a career services capacity. The last four years of my professional career have been

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primarily focused on internships in undergraduate business education. In my current role in the

Grant University College of Business, I serve as the Director of Internships & Career Services.

This is a Teaching Faculty 1 position where I also instruct nine online business internship

courses and manage the daily operations of an internship and career services office. Prior to

joining the College, I served as an Assistant Director in the experiential learning unit of the

Grant University Career Center. In this role, I assisted all majors in finding internship

opportunities, provided career advising services, conducted career development workshops, and

coordinated professional development programs.

I view internships as an essential component of undergraduate business education. By

gaining work experience, students become more marketable and better prepared for the rigors of

today's workplace. During my personal higher education journey, I participated in four

internship experiences and multiple part-time jobs both on and off-campus. I chose this study

because of my passion for the field and my belief in the impact that internships can have on

student success. These experiences have enhanced my understanding of internships and also

played a major role in my ability to connect with my research participants.

I am a research participant and the primary research instrument in this study. Therefore,

maintaining researcher memos was instrumental in my ability to thoughtfully reflect on my

individual interviews, focus group, document reviews, and my own personal views. It is

important to recognize that my personal bias may have affected how I view and comprehend the

data, but my closeness to the study has contributed a richness that exceeds the detail found in a

typical research narrative. I recognize the need to be open to the thoughts and opinions of others

and have thus carefully constructed the knowledge shared in this study by filtering my beliefs

through the beliefs of my research participants in order to develop another interpretation of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Merriam, 20009).

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were defined:

*Accreditation*: Endorsement of proficiency in a specific subject or area of expertise. The integrity of an organization is also often recognized by a well-respected accrediting organization (Business Dictionary, n.d.)

*Business Education:* Academic discipline where students are taught general business knowledge and commercially useful skills that will prepare them for various roles including business leaders, managers, and university professors in business education (Business Education, n.d.; Reference, 2017). Business education and management education are often used interchangeably, but for this study business education will be the term most referenced.

*College or School of Business: "*Educational facility that specializes in teaching material relevant to the field of business or business services" (Business School, n.d.).

*Curriculum*: A set of courses offered by an educational institution (Curriculum, n.d.)

*Experiential Learning:* Any form of learning that allows students to put theory to practice by applying their knowledge to real-world situations outside of the traditional classroom setting (University of Texas at Austin, 2016; University of Colorado Denver, 2015). Forms of experiential learning include, but are not limited to, internships, co-ops, service learning, practicums, undergraduate research, laboratory activities, design projects, cultural immersion programs, apprenticeships, and other creative activities (Moore, 2010; University of Colorado Denver, 2015).

*Internships:* The "dominant form of experiential learning used in business schools worldwide to give students practical experience and help them transition to the real world" (Kosnik, Tingle, Blanton, 2013, p. 616).

*Postsecondary:* education provided at the college or university level (Postsecondary, n.d.)

*Professional Development:* A variety of activities, trainings, programs, or other forms of learning intended to help an individual improve their knowledge, competence, skill, abilities, and effectiveness (Professional Development, 2013). For this study, all forms of experiential learning will be classified as professional development opportunities.

*Soft Skills:* A set of personal qualities, abilities, attributes, or talents that can help an individual set themselves apart from other's while improving relationships with co-workers, customers, and clients (James & James, 2004; Maier, 2014; & Perreault, 2004). Soft skills are a combination of interpersonal and social skills (Blaszczynski, 2012; James & James, 2004). Some examples include communication skills, collaborating, problem-solving, listening, flexibility, and humility (Blaszczynski, 2012).

*Skills Gap:* The difference in the skills required for a job and the actual skills possessed by an employee. When employees lack a certain knowledge or training, this often creates a skills gap – a disconnect between what employers are seeking and what employees have to offer - preventing the employee from effectively performing the job responsibilities (Skill Gap, 2017; CareerOneStop, 2017). A skills gap can include both hard and soft skills.

*Undergraduate:* A college or university student that has not received the first degree especially a bachelor's degree (Undergraduate, n.d.).

**Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to an examination of internships in undergraduate business education at an AACSB accredited business school at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States.  Conclusions and recommendations drawn may have relevance for other colleges and schools of business but reflect only the understanding gained from the intensive research obtained from a single case of an undergraduate institution. There was no presentation of other institutions, no graduate student involvement, and no comparative analysis of similar programs.

This study was also limited in the sense that the researcher was a participant observer who has been involved in the development and execution of internship programs within the institution being studied. Acknowledging this relationship between researcher and subject was necessary, as it certainly impacted the findings and conclusions drawn from this study.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The purpose of this case study was to describe, analyze, and draw conclusions about internships in undergraduate business education at an AACSB accredited business school at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States. The review of literature related to this study was divided into the following sections:

1. A historical overview of undergraduate business education;

2. An overview of business school accreditation standards and curriculum;

3. An overview of the skills gap;

4. An overview of internships in undergraduate business education;

5. A look into the employment outlook for business school graduates; and

6. The future of the business education curricula.

These areas have been identified because of their relevance to business education, internships, and the possible development of new initiatives.

### History of Undergraduate Business Education

The founding of the Wharton School has long been identified as the formal establishment of undergraduate business education in the United States (Hugstad, 1983). Following the Civil War, the desire to educate wealthy young men on how to maintain their affluence became a major issue for older, white men prompting them to donate money for the explicit purpose of establishing business schools to address this concern (Hugsted, 1983). Soon thereafter, business education experienced significant growth. Between World War I & World War II, large

corporations were developed; business and social status became more intertwined; and women were granted access to business education representing 17% of business degrees by 1928 (Hugsted, 1983). In 1950, business school enrollments hit their peak with more than 76,000 baccalaureate degrees awarded (Hugsted, 1983). Along with this growth came awareness of the changing demographics; criticism of current educational practices; and a need to reevaluate the mission, values, and benefits of business education moving forward (Hugsted, 1983).

**Business Education Reform.** Problems that plagued the early business schools involved two primary areas: unification of the curriculum and a lack of agreement on the training needs of students on various topics including the social value of business education (Hayes & Jackson, 1935). The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) was established in 1916 to address these concerns and promote higher education for business worldwide (AACSB, 2017; College Atlas, 2014; Hayes & Jackson, 1935). Their primary goals included training students on the basics of business, leadership, and ethics while developing skills for specialized business fields (Hayes & Jackson, 1935). This new concentration toward a more practical orientation on skill development took center stage after the war, primarily, due to the emerging new society; the new management style; and a growing concern for reform in business education (Morsing & Rovira, 2011). Consequently, two of the largest private foundations during that time, the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation, played a significant role in the reform initiatives that eventually changed the trajectory of the discipline as we know it today (Morsing & Rovira, 2011).

This period of "self-criticism and examination" (Hugsted, 1983, p. 10) led to the development of two landmark studies, *The Education of American Businessmen: A Study of University-College Programmes in Business Administration* by Professor Frank C. Pierson and

*Higher Education for Business* by economists Robert A. Gordon and James E. Howell ("Gordon-Howell," 2009; Zimmerman, 2001). Funded by the Carnegie Foundation and the Ford Foundation, respectively, each report addressed concerns among critics citing uncertainty about the future of business education and its overall impact ("Gordon-Howell," 2009; Schoemaker, 2008; Zimmerman, 2001). Of the two reports, the findings obtained by Gordon and Howell *(later known as the Gordon-Howell Report)* were the most dismal prompting their reference to business education as an assembly of vocational schools with narrow curriculum, ineffective staff, low quality students, and a faculty that focused more on consulting than research, theory, and ethics ("Gordon-Howell," 2009; Hugsted, 1983; Schoemaker, 2008; Zimmerman, 2001). The effects of this report were felt in business schools around the world and scholars began suggesting that business education do a better job focusing on the student's entire career and not just the first job (Zimmerman, 2001).

Overall, the Gordon-Howell Report produced in-depth research while providing more than 30 million dollars to address business education reform (Morsing & Rovira, 2011; Schlossman, Sedlak, & Wechsler, 1987). Among the recommendations included an increase in the general education content of undergraduate studies; elimination of concentrations and streamlining of the number of required courses; a shift in teaching methods; and higher standards in the student admission process (Gordon & Howell, 1959). In addition, scholars believed that more faculty with doctorate degrees in the social sciences and quantitative fields where necessary to increase training in quantitative analysis and the behavioral sciences (Morsing & Rovira, 2011). At that time, corporate managers used elaborate quantitative tools developed during the war to run their companies; therefore, it was important to ensure that business graduates were equipped with these skills (Morsing & Rovira, 2011). This approach caused

business educators to focus more attention on technical expertise and less on developing socially aware graduates (Morsing & Rovira, 2011). The *Gordon-Howell Report* contributed to substantial changes in business education between 1960 and 1980 causing the discipline to became a more valued component of higher education (Porter & McKibbin, 1988).

Almost 30 years later, the AACSB commissioned another study to examine the future of management education from a more holistic view (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). The *Porter-McKibbin Report*, one of the most comprehensive studies of management education to date, identified complacency as the primary barrier that business schools face in their efforts to successfully move into the 21st century (Dalton, Earley, Hitt, & Porter, 2009). This study furthered the findings from the *Gordon-Howell Report* and shed light on the need to bring more attention to developing student skills and other personal characteristics (Porter & McKibbin, 1998). The Porter-McKibbin Report also identified a disproportionate focus on analytics in business education with minimal support for the development of soft skills like leadership and communication (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). What made this study unique is the inclusion of viewpoints from corporations and third-party providers, areas that scholars involved in the 1959 study predicted would play a significant role in business education in the years ahead (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). Decades later, these concerns remain at the forefront of business education reform; however, the findings of both studies play an important role in our understanding of the issues and our efforts to implement change.

**Accreditation Standards & Curriculum**

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) is the oldest accrediting organization for business schools worldwide and has long been considered the highest level of accreditation (All Business Schools, 2017; Shiffler & Bowen, 2014). The

AACSB accreditation status has been achieved by only 25% of business schools in the United States (All Business Schools, 2017); however, it still remains the premiere association in this category. Many options exist for university accreditation, but Roller, Andrews, and Bovee (2003) identified the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), and the International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE) as the most prominent. The following section will provide an overview of each organization.

**Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.** The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) is a non-profit corporation with the goal of enhancing business education through the creation and implementation of accreditation standards (AACSB, 2016; Dumond & Johnson, 2013). The AACSB has served over 100 years as the world's largest business education alliance with more than 1500 member-organizations and more than 789 accredited business schools worldwide. Its impact is far reaching and continues to transform business education for schools, students, industry, and community (AACSB, 2017).

The first set of AACSB business school standards was developed in 1919, and throughout the years, multiple updates have been made to meet the needs of the changing business education environment. To date, the most significant changes occurred in 1991, 2003, and 2013 (Miles, Franklin, Heriot, Hadley, & Hazeldine, 2014). The 2013 standards identified three themes for improvement: innovation, impact, and engagement (AACSB, 2016; Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013; Miles, et al, 2014). The new standards suggest that business schools experiment with new teaching methods; demonstrate how their institution and students are positively impacting business and society; and incorporate more real-world experiences into the curriculum (Kosnik, et al, 2013).

AACSB accredited schools are required to participate in a self-evaluation and a peer review to ensure that they uphold standards that fall under the following four categories: (a) strategic management and innovation; (b) students, faculty, and professional staff; (c) learning and teaching; and (d) academic and professional engagement (AACSB, 2016; Dumond & Johnson, 2013). Standard #13 specifically addresses the need for business schools to provide experiential learning opportunities.

> For any teaching and learning model employed, the school provides a portfolio of experiential learning opportunities for business students, through either formal coursework or extracurricular activities, which allow them to engage with faculty and active business leaders. These experiential learning activities provide exposure to business and management in both local and global contexts…They …may include field trips, internships, consulting projects, field research, interdisciplinary projects, extracurricular activities, etc. (AACSB, 2016, p. 38).

The 2013 standards also included the AACSB core values – ethical behavior among students, faculty, and administrators; a collegial environment; and a commitment toward social responsibility – as requirements for accreditation (Miles et al, 2014). These changes were significant for business schools around the world prompting deans to re-evaluate their mission, their business relationships, and their strategies for delivery of a quality business education curriculum to the students they serve.

The new standards brought about positive change to individuals and their ability to have their opinions considered; yet deans faced more pressure than ever to shape the culture of their business school while acquiring more external funding to support new initiatives (Miles et al, 2014). In addition, a number of opponents have questioned the value that AACSB accreditation

brings to business education (Dumond & Johnson, 2013). Some of those concerns include its suitability for the competitive nature of business education; its role in hindering the schools in their ability to adapt to change but maintain the status quo; and questions regarding whether it works for or against professionalism (Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2006; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Trank & Rynes, 2003). Advocates cite the value it places on quality and advances in business education; the clear distinction between purpose and strategy; and the external endorsement that it provides to prospective students, faculty, and employers (Romero, 2008; Zammuto, 2008; & Trapnell, 2007). Further research is needed to elaborate on the overall impact of these changes. However, Miles et al (2014) found the standards to be flexible enough to potentially enhance the global influence of business education for years to come.

**Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP).** The Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (2017), was established in 1988 with a focus on "recognizing teaching excellence, determining student learning outcomes, and a continuous improvement model" (Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs, 2017; para. 1). AACSB and ACBSP both value research, but ACBSP also places a strong focus on the quality of instructional methods (Bennett, Geringer, Taylor, 2015). Of the three accrediting organizations mentioned, ACBSP is the only one to develop a process to accredit 2-year business programs at community colleges and for-profit universities, sectors that account for more than half of their membership base (Bennett, Geringer, & Taylor, 2015; Roller, Andrews, & Bovee, 2003).

**International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE).** The IACBE was established in 1997 to evaluate business schools on outcome-based measurements (Bennett, Geringer, Taylor, 2015). Bennett, Geringer, and Taylor (2015) found that many academicians

were concerned that accreditation was too highly focused on research and teaching yet failed to recognize schools with institutional missions that addressed outcomes and results. Institutions that gravitate toward membership in IACBE are typically non-traditional programs and others that failed to meet the accreditation criteria outlined by AACSB or ACBSP.

**Business Education Curriculum.** The primary disciplines found in undergraduate schools of business include accounting, finance, management, and marketing (Colby, Ehrilich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011). These disciplines have evolved over the years with an emphasis on scientific knowledge and a close relationship to MBA programs which explains why many faculty members teach both undergraduate and graduate courses (Colby, Ehrilich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011). The core business curriculum was designed to equip students with the skills necessary to function in business; however, early reform initiatives sought to incorporate more liberal arts courses in an effort to strengthen the curriculum (Colby, Ehrilich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011).

The early curriculum was extensive covering everything from political science to sociology and business subjects totaling 91-course topics and 6,624 class hours (Bossard & Dewhurst, 1931; Hayes & Jackson, 1935). Much emphasis was placed on English, but little on courses that covered the fundamentals of business (Boussard & Dewhurst, 1931). The *Gordon-Howell Report* led to major curriculum changes between 1960 and 1980 (Porter & McKibbin, 1998). The recommendations from the report, the Ford Foundation's financial support, and the revised (AACSB) curriculum standards all played a significant role in the change in direction of business education during this era (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). Thus, 50% of the curriculum was directed toward general education; professional core courses were identified; and electives from both business and non-business areas were permitted (Jones, 1984; Porter & McKibbin, 1988).

The *Gordon-Howell Report* also recommended that the role of establishing and enforcing curriculum guidelines be the responsibility of the AACSB (Jones, 1984). Reactions to these suggestions were mixed across the business education community; however, change came swiftly and continues to occur in business schools across the country.

Perhaps the *Gordon-Howell Report* was the impetus for the AACSB's decision to commission another study on the future of management education led by Professors Lyman Porter and Lawrence McKibbin. The *Porter-McKibbin Report* described the current state of management education and elaborated on how it must change for the field to thrive in the years ahead. This report was unique because of the rich perspectives received from both the academic and business community (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). Porter and McKibbin (1988) found seven areas in the curriculum that received harsh criticism. Those areas include

- an imbalance in the delivery of quantitative vs. qualitative analytical techniques;

- inadequate attention on how to manage people;

- lack of attention on developing communication skills;

- inadequate attention on developing relationships and learning how to cope with the external environment;

- lack of attention on the international aspects of business;

- insufficient focus on entrepreneurship; and

- inadequate attention toward developing ethical business leaders (Porter & McKibbin, 1988).

Additional findings from the Porter-McKibbin Report identified business communication, entrepreneurship, international business/management, and management information systems as content areas in need of emphasis while the development of skills and

personal characteristics were highlighted as areas in need of special attention (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). Deans and faculty members saw a wide gap in skill development while student perception was in conflict possibly due to their overall lack of work experience (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). Human Resource professionals and other corporate employees reported the same concerns and strongly suggested that the business curriculum be enhanced to address these issues (Porter & McKibbin, 1988).

Jones (1984) identified major concerns with the structure of the postsecondary business education curriculum in the areas of course design; credibility of sources and components used in course development; and career preparation and employment outcomes. These issues forced some scholars to believe that the new curriculum failed to produce graduates that were equipped with the tools necessary to handle real-life business situations. Instead, graduates were leaving their institutions able to perform calculations but lacking in skills to manage others (Jones, 1984). A debate was also ignited on whether material taught in business schools should come from the faculty, students, business, or society (Jones, 1984). With many schools relying on faculty to determine course content and research areas, critics noted that such a contained system could stifle the development of successful business school graduates (Jones, 1984).

Due to the changing economy, industry professionals now expect business students to come into the workforce job-ready. Therefore, the responsibility comes back to academia to prepare student theoretically and experientially with the skills to make wise decisions and handle business situations as they arise (Kumar & Bhandarker, 2017). With this knowledge comes a gradual shift in the priorities of business education to ensure that curriculum is more relevant to the changing demographics; employer satisfaction is taken into consideration (Eisner, 1999; Hodge et al., 2014; Jones, 1984); and AACSB standards are periodically "modified to emphasize

quality and continuous improvement in the changing collegiate business education environments" (Miles, Franklin, Heriot, Hadley, & Hazeldine, 2014, p. 87)

**Skills Gap**

**Skills Gap Defined.** A growing number of industry professionals are expressing concern about the skill level of their new hires and the increasing skills gap that exists among recent college graduates (Cappelli, 2015). When the skills of the employee do not match the skills needed by the employer, a disconnect occurs that negatively effects the employee/manager relationship and the effective execution of assigned tasks. According to Cappelli (2015), the skills gap is often attributed to a failure in the public education system. Unfortunately, many young adults are entering the workforce with technical aptitude and basic job knowledge, but lack the soft skills necessary to obtain and maintain quality employment (Beard, Schwieger, & Surendran, 2008; Blaszczynski & Green, 2012; Maier, 2014; Tulgan, 2015). Blascynski (2012) and Tulgan (2015) defined soft skills as a combination of interpersonal and social skills that include areas such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, listening, flexibility, and humbleness. These "non-technical competencies associated with one's personality, attitude, and ability to interact effectively with others" contribute significantly to an individual's job success (Stewart, Wall, & Marciniec, 2016; p. 276). A survey conducted by the *Wall Street Journal* found that 92% of executives see "soft skills as equally important or more important than technical skills" (Davidson, 2016, para 11). "Eighty-nine percent of those same respondents emphasized that they have a hard time finding employees that possess these traits irrespective of age and experience level" (Davidson, 2016, para 11). Business leaders and managers are concerned that new job candidates have not learned basic skills at home, high school, or even college (Tulgan, 2015). Tulgan (2015) noted that most managers feel that it should not be their

responsibility to address the skills gap in new employees citing a lack of time, ability, and resources as primary reasons. Instead, these skills should be learned prior to entering the workforce; yet, many organizations are left to handle these deficiencies which cost them a significant amount of time and money (Tulgan, 2015).

Research on skill development can be traced back to the 1970s with the work of Professor Ivar Berg who asserted that early training on skill development was not effective but was developed with intentions other than enhancing individual employability skills (Cappelli, 2015). This study was the catalyst for increased research on skill development and skill mismatch in the years following; however, the majority of this research occurred outside of the United States (Cappelli, 2015). Stephen Vaisey's study of the mismatch between education and occupation in America is perhaps the most direct representation of research on skill development in the U.S. (Cappelli, 2015). Vaisey (2006) concluded that a large number of American's are skilled, but those skills are beyond those needed for the positions they occupy causing an increased number of overqualified individuals to inhabit the workspace, a disparity that will continue to grow.

According to Cappelli (2015), most data on skill development has been obtained from job assessments and employer/employee feedback; therefore, research is limited and often presents contradictory information. In addition, "education levels are much easier to assess than skill levels" (Cappelli, 2015, p. 266). Nevertheless, skills have been widely viewed as the largest area of job growth (Cappelli, 2015) and employers continue to seek ways to develop employees with the skills they need for job success.

**Generational Impact.** The soft skills gap is widening from one generation to the next with Generation Z representing a "tipping point in the post-Boomer generational shift

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transforming the workforce" (Tulgan, 2018, para 6; Tulgan, 2012, p. 12). Generation Z consists of individuals born between 1995 and 2010 (Iorgulescu, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2015) and by 2019, they will represent 20% of the workforce (Adecco, 2015). What makes this generation unique are the historical events that have occurred since their birth (Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Tulgan, 2015). Globalization, technology, institutional uncertainty, the information environment, and human diversity have all played a significant role in this generation's beliefs and attitudes toward work (Tulgan, 2015).

Generation Z is more familiar with working across borders; multi-tasking; adjusting to changing technologies and uncertainties about the economy; accessing information electronically; communicating using multiple digital devices; and working with various cultures in what many believe to be the most diverse workforce in history (Iorgulescu, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2015; Tulgan, 2015). While these changes present amazing opportunities for workforce development, they also present conflicting ideas between generations on how work should be performed (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). By gaining a better understanding of the generations in the workforce, we gain greater insight into why the skills gap is widening and how identification of the issues can help address concerns.

Baby Boomers, the generation born between 1946 and 1964, grew up with traditional values that included an 8 to 5 work schedule, a strong appreciation for hard work, and a belief in the importance of work-life balance (Fogg, 2009; Mencl & Lester, 2014; Seemiller & Grace, 2015). They grew up in an era where positivity and opportunity were instilled in them from birth (Zemke, Filipczak, & Raines, 2013). In contrast, Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, grew up at the height of cable television and the growing trend of having both parents working outside of the home which gave them a sense of independence (Seemiller & Grace, 2015).

However, they still managed to treasure the work-life balance principle that their parents so diligently sought to maintain (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Glass, 2007; Seemiller & Grace, 2015).

Generation Y, also known as Millennials and sometimes referred to as the *'me-generation,'* exude a sense of entitlement, have high career expectations, are consumed by technology, and have close relationships with parents (DelCampo, Haggerty, Knippel, & Ashley, 2011; Mencl & Lester, 2014; Seemiller & Grace, 2015). A study conducted by Twenge and Foster (2008, 2010), found that students classified as Generation Y in 2006 were 30% more narcissistic than their counterparts in 1982. This *'self-involved'* focus played a significant role in workplace behavior and relationships. Millennials are also viewed as highly educated and tolerant of cultural differences, but strongly oppose the traditional 8-5 workday that previous generations are accustomed (DelCampo, Haggerty, Knippel, & Ashley, 2011; Seemiller & Grace, 2015).

The generations differ in various ways, but they also share similarities that transcend age. A study conducted by Lester, Standifer, Schultz, and Windsor (2012) found that while generations placed a different value on teamwork and collaboration, all viewed these characteristics as important and desire to engage in collaborative work at some level in their professions. In addition, Baby Boomers and Generation Y both value flexibility in work in order to maintain a work-life balance that helps Baby Boomers, in particular, with personal demands such as taking care of elderly parents (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001; Hewlett, Sherbin, & Sumbert, 2009).

According to Tulgan (2015), Generation Z is accustomed to making their own rules and only conforming to the directives of a parent or guardian; therefore, they find it difficult to

understand how "old-fashioned" soft skills could benefit an employer, let alone themselves. As Millennials enter the workforce and Generation Z matriculates through college, employers increasingly recognize that "you can't hire your way around the soft skills gap" (Tulgan, 2015, p. 33). No matter how highly trained an employee may be in the hard skills, all new employees require some type of onboarding and on-the-job training that should include some component of soft skills training that strategically informs the new hire of the policies and practices of their new employer (Tulgan, 2015). Continued research on the generations provides a significant resource to educate employers and "eliminate unfounded generational stereotypes" (Mencl & Lester, 2014, p. 269). This knowledge can aid in the creation of a more collaborative work environment that embraces the diversity that each generation brings to the workforce.

  **Soft Skills**. Increases in technology and other alternative ways of work have revolutionized the workforce by increasing productivity and our ability to do more with less. However, these innovations have not diminished the need for skills that go beyond the intellectual, hands-on abilities that often receive so much attention. Soft skills, personal characteristics that aid in our ability to work well with others, are crucial in today's labor market. Yet, employers continue to express concern over the lack of soft skills they find in recent hires. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2015) identified the following as the top 10 soft skills that employers seek in college graduates: leadership, teamwork, written communication, problem-solving, verbal communication, work ethic, initiative, analytical/quantitative skills, flexibility/adaptability; and staying current on changing technologies (see Table 1).

  According to Laker and Powell (2011), research on soft skill and hard skills training is scarce. The latter may be due to the belief that hard skills training has been guided by practice

and not theory (Swanson & Holton, 1997; Williams, 2001). In 2015, the Society of Human

Resource Management conducted a study to determine employer perception of the skills their

new employee's lack. Those skills included professionalism/work ethic; relationship building;

business acumen; written communications; critical thinking/problem-solving; leadership;

lifelong learning/self-direction; teamwork/collaboration; coaching skills; and flexibility/openness

to new experience (Stewart, Wall, & Marciniec, 2016). Both studies demonstrate the important

role that soft skills play in professional success; however, concern continues to grow as

employers work to identify candidates that meet their employment needs in both the hard and

soft areas of skill development.

**Table 1.** Top 10 Soft Skills Employers Seek in College Graduates

| Skill | Employer % |
|---|---|
| Leadership | 80.1 |
| Teamwork | 78.9 |
| Written Communication | 68.9 |
| Problem-Solving | 70.2 |
| Verbal Communication | 68.9 |
| Work Ethic | 68.9 |
| Initiative | 65.8 |
| Analytical/quantitative | 62.7 |
| Flexibility/adaptability | 60.9 |

*Source:* Adapted from "Mixed Signals: Do College Graduates Have the Soft Skills That Employers Want? By C. Stewart, A. Wall, & S. Marciniec, 2016, *Competition Form, 14*(2), p. 278. Copyright 2015 by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

Most soft skills are learned through active participation in activities that occur outside of

a textbook or a traditional classroom lecture (Blasczynski & Green, 2012; Halsey, 2011; Stewart,

Wall, & Marciniec, 2016). According to Stewart, Wall, & Marciniec (2016) some organizations

have introduced soft skill development training into the workplace; however, those programs are

typically the first to be cut from the budget because of the difficulty in measuring return on

investment. Halsey (2011) suggests that the 70/30 principle could help educators shift their focus

to include more active learning in the teaching environment. In this approach, learners do 70% of

the talking and 30% of the listening; educators spend 70% of their time designing the learning

experience and 30% determining the content to be taught; and learners spend 30% of the time

learning (e.g. being taught) and 70% of the time practicing what they've learned (see Table 2)

(Halsey, 2011). While this suggestion deviates from the common practices found among faculty

in postsecondary business education, the emphasis on active student learning could reap benefits

for students, employers, and institutions alike.

**Table 2.** Rebalancing the Learning Equation – The 70/30 Principle

| From: | To: |
| --- | --- |
| 70% you talk/teach | 70% they talk/do |
| 70% what you are going to teach | 70% how you are going to teach it |
| 70% of time you teach skills | 70% of time learners practice/build skills |

*Source:* Adapted from "*Brilliance by design: Creating learning experiences that connect, inspire,
and ENGAGE. By V.* Halsey, (2011). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Faculty play a primary role in curriculum reform. In 1966, the American Association of

University Professors (AAUP) declared their position on faculty involvement in curriculum

reform by updating its position statement designating faculty as responsible for "curriculum,

methods of instruction, research and faculty status, among other factors" (Duffy, 2015; p. 12).  In

1987, the National Education Association (1987) also affirmed that faculty members have

primary responsibility for developing course content that addresses the needs of a diverse student

population; therefore, reform efforts cannot "succeed without adequate support for the faculty"

(p. 9). While the faculty role remains clear, it also partially explains why curriculum changes that

address the skills gap are sometimes difficult to implement in higher education. According to

Tanyel, Mitchell, and McAlum (1999), politics and conflicting thoughts among faculty about what constitutes a legitimate and worthwhile curriculum change often necessitates a slow response to reform initiatives. Regardless of the reformation process, research continues to show that mastering soft skills is just as essential as the development of hard skills (Blaszczynski & Green, 2012; Dixon, Belnmap, Albrecht, & Lee, 2010; Wilhelm, Logan, & Smith, 2002). With this knowledge, it becomes imperative that postsecondary business education take a closer look at ways to address these mounting concerns in order to produce graduates with the skills employers need.

**Leadership Skills in Business**.  Nelson and Quick (1995) defined leadership as "the process of guiding and directing the behavior of people in the work environment" (p. 358). While this definition is still applicable, leadership has undergone an evolution in formal characterization, but the premise remains the same. Leadership is often noted as one of the top skills that employers seek in new hires; yet, many students are entering the workforce lacking this proficiency (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2015; Stewart, Wall, & Marciniec, 2016). Courses on leadership development are common in the undergraduate business curriculum, but are not required by all business programs (Colby, Ehrilich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011). Programs that teach leadership often do so through an organizational behavior course (Nirenberg, 1998). According to Nirenberg (1998), these courses need to be re-evaluated to ensure that students are learning the realities of leadership and not the myths.

No longer can individuals assume that a person in a leadership role is equipped with the skills necessary to effectively guide the thoughts and actions of others. Nirenberg (1998) found that leadership is a process that requires the leader to gain respect from subordinates. According to Nicholas and Cottrell (2014), good leaders are trustworthy and competent. They give the

subordinate confidence in knowing that a goal can be reached without the leader taking

advantage of them or the situation (Nichols & Cottrell, 2014).

According to Pfeffer (2009), "business schools see themselves as being in the business of

producing leaders for both public and private sector organizations" (p. 2). However, when

companies feel that employee skills do not match the skills they need, many take the initiative to

create their own programs to help fill the gap. Leadership development programs, internal

universities, and partnerships with leadership professionals are some of the approaches that

companies have taken to improve employee leadership development (Pfeffer, 2009). A survey

conducted in 2001 found that the most successful companies in the development of strong

leaders are those that provide adequate resources and programs along with sufficient time for

senior management to get involved in leadership development activities (Pfeffer, 2009).

Leadership development has become a profitable business for business schools and

companies alike through the creation of leadership development centers, endowed chairs in

leadership, and the billions of dollars that companies spend each year to offer leadership training

to its employees (Gomez, 2007; Pfeffer, 2009). Nirenberg (1998) found that "leadership is not a

function of the position, it is a role that everyone can (and will) play" (p. 94). Therefore, it

becomes imperative that preparing students with leadership skills remain a priority as the

undergraduate business curriculum is developed and enhanced.

**Experiential Learning in Business Education**

The Experiential Learning Model, based on the Lewinian Model of Action and

Laboratory Training, was developed in the 1970s (Miettinen, 2000) and serves as a visual

representation of how "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb,

2015, p. 49). Although Kolb's Experiential Learning Model provides a fundamental view of the

experiential learning process, the theoretical foundations can be attributed to the work of theorist

Kurt Lewin, genetic epistemologist Jean Piaget, and philosopher John Dewey (Kolb, 2015;

Miettinen, 2000). Learners can experience, reflect, think, and act in a "recursive process that is

sensitive to the learning situation and what is being learned" (Kolb, 2015, p. 51; Kolb & Kolb,

2009, p. 298).

Over the years, higher education has seen an increase in the use of experiential learning

as a training tool. The primary reasons for this increase include (a) the onset of new technologies

that provide useful tools for training; (b) younger generations preferring experiential learning

over other methods of education; and (c) the belief that creative people bring significant ideas

(Silberman, 2007). Scholars have come to the realization that courses alone will not produce

long-term, proficient practitioners (Hager, 2011). Therefore, experiential learning programs

provide an educational alternative to help develop and maintain a highly skilled workforce.

Employer demand and an increased push by the Association to Advance Collegiate

Schools of Business (AACSB) to increase experiential learning in both local and global practices

of business have been significant factors in the growth of experiential learning in postsecondary

business education (Griffis, 2014; Hart Research Associates, 2008; Sciglimpaglia & Toole,

2009). A poll by Hart Research Associates (2008) found that employers preferred practical

experience to traditional classroom lectures as a method of teaching. Therefore, the need for an

enhanced curriculum becomes more evident as business schools work to produce the employees

that employers seek while meeting and maintaining the standards that their accrediting agency

requires.  Research continues to suggest that experiential learning enhances student development

and that adults learn more effectively by doing (Fenwick, 2000, 2001, 2003; Kolb & Kolb,

2008). However, Rosenstein, Sweeney, and Gupta (2012), note that a shared language could help

schools better understand experiential learning so that its effectiveness transcends programs and majors, thus making it a necessary and vital component in higher education and beyond (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Fenwick, 2000, 2001, 2003; Kolb & Kolb, 2008; Moore, Barry, & Dooley, 2010).

**Internships in Undergraduate Business Education.** Internships, a form of experiential learning, have become a common feature in undergraduate business programs (Hergert, 2009; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008) with 92% of business schools offering some type of internship experience (Coco, 2000). Since the AACSB's recommendation to increase experiential learning in business education, internships have played a significant role in addressing this directive (Hergert, 2009).  In recent years, employers have expected interns to come into the workplace trained while students expect employers to provide the training (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000, Hurst & Good, 2010). With this knowledge, academia has recognized that students with real-world work experience are more desirable to employers because they often require less training and less supervision (Birch, Allen, McDonald, & Tomaszczyk, 2010; Gault et al., 2000; Hurst & Good, 2010; McDonald, Birch, Hitchman, Fox, & Lido, 2010). These findings have elevated internships as a necessary component in the undergraduate business curriculum with more business schools increasing their focus on various internship forms (Birch et al., 2010; Gault et al., 2000; Hurst & Good, 2010).

International internships and virtual internships have become popular alternatives to the traditional internships offered in many colleges and schools of business. According to Zhang (2012), trends in globalization have produced a world in need of intercultural competence in communication, work experience, and understanding. Through participation in an international internship, students are able to gain these skills along with a sense of confidence and

independence that they may not be able to obtain in an internship located in their home country (Zhang, 2012).

Unfortunately, international internships present financial and physical constraints for some students creating a space to introduce virtual internships into the curriculum. The increase in online learning and the growing effects of these constraints have contributed to an increase in the development of virtual internships in higher education (Ruggiero & Boehm, 2016). Virtual internships help to "equip the student with the necessary skills for teleworking and online collaboration in an international setting, skills that he or she will most likely need more and more in his or her future professional life" (Vriens, 2015, p. 63). Virtual internships also provide more flexibility in work schedules, but often leave the intern feeling isolated when working on a large project with clearly defined goals (Vriens, 2015). Acknowledging these limitations allows the supervisor to set agreements with the intern to establish consistent communication and tools to aid in collaboration throughout the virtual experience (Vriens, 2015). In addition, Vriens (2015) notes that having interaction with multiple employees of a company during a virtual internship helps the student develop socialization skills and cultural competence. Virtual internships bring value to education, and many institutions are beginning to recognize them as important forms of experiential learning in the development of student skills and competencies.

Knouse and Fontenot (2008) found that while internships enhance employability and allow interns to gain both work and organizational learning, they can be improved with clearer expectations, more hands-on experience, and more involvement from both students and employers during the internship development process. "The value of the internship will be maximized if educators can provide the appropriate structure and integrate the experience with the academic background of the student" (Hergert, 2009, p. 12). Business schools are constantly

trying to attract the best students and develop relationships with top companies (Gerken, Rienties, Giesbers, & Konings, 2012). Therefore, improvements in the effectiveness of internships can provide significant benefits not only to the students but employers and business schools alike.

**Other Forms of Experiential Learning.** The most common forms of experiential learning offered in postsecondary business education include internships, mentorships, service learning, capstone courses, cooperative education placements, job shadowing, and a curriculum based on entrepreneurship (Govekar & Rishi, 2007; Griffis, 2014; McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006). While internships are the most widely used, field-based consulting, a methodology that utilizes students and student teams to consult with actual companies, is quickly becoming a common fixture in the business school curriculum (Griffis, 2016; Sciglimpaglia & Toole, 2009). Using the structure of a traditional consulting firm, students work to solve real-life challenges under the mentorship of a professor; present their findings to the client; and receive a grade for their work (Griffis, 2014). The popularity of field-based consulting has grown exponentially within the last 10 years with more than 65% of U.S. business schools offering this form of experiential learning or some other student consulting program (Allen, 2010; Griffis, 2014).

Student competitions allow the student to solve a real-world business problem or a simulated case problem using research techniques. The collaborative nature of student competitions provides opportunities for cash prizes, participation in higher level competitions, and the creation of additional courses based on the competition model (Griffis, 2014). Student-run investment funds provide a unique opportunity for students to compete with other schools to determine the best quality in fund managers. Investment funds were originally extra-curricular activities but are now becoming embedded into the business school curriculum through course

design (Griffis, 2014). Funds are collected from various sources and then become university-owned resources managed by students (Neeley & Cooley, 2004).  According to Neely & Cooley (2004), investment funds provide opportunities for a student to build skills that most employers deem attractive in their search for high-quality talent. Those skills include teamwork, research methods, public speaking, and analytical thinking.

Integrating experiential learning exercises and activities such as cases, projects, in-class exercise, guest speakers, and video cases into the traditional classroom has also become an effective practice to "facilitate the integration and application of course concepts" while developing student skills (Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005, p. 11). Case studies are, perhaps, the most common experiential exercise used by business schools today; however, McCarthy & McCarthy (2006), note that the faculty member's central role in facilitating discussions can hamper the student's active engagement, therefore, reducing the overall impact of the activity. According to Gremler, Hoffman, Keaveney, and Wright (2000), classrooms must become more collaborative placing the primary focus back on the learner to gain knowledge while the professor acts as a coach (Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005). Paul and Mukhopadhyay (2005) found that "this shift in notion from 'teaching business' to helping students 'learn business' is a big paradigm shift in business education" (p.12) that will help address the criticism that business schools focus too much on research and not enough time using practical learning experiences to preparing students with the skills they need for career success (Lamb, Shipp, and Moncrief, 1995; Templeton, Updyke, & Bennet, 2012). "Experiential exercises that demand rigorous engagement and involvement on the part of students are found to be an invaluable pedagogical tool in underscoring and achieving learning objectives related to decision making in a dynamic 'real-life' environment" (Devasagayam, Johns-Masten, & McCollum, 2012, p. 1).

**Benefits and Limitations.** Internships have been widely viewed as a popular and beneficial form of experiential learning in undergraduate business education (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013). They allow students to immerse themselves into an organization's culture, participate in realistic tasks, gain insight into career choices, prepare for future employment, gain an individualized experience, and provide motivation to remain in a chosen career field (Divine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007; Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013). Internships also help students develop skills in judgement, integrity, trust, and collaboration while promoting the development of moral values (Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013). Gault, Redington, and Schlager (2000) found that interns have greater job satisfaction and also have more leverage to request a higher salary.

While the benefits are noteworthy, it is important to identify some of the limitations that internships pose for students and institutions. Among those include (a) an extensive time commitment, (b) logistics and location, (c) placement, (d) costs, (e) variableness in the quality of the experience, (f) limited integration with business curriculum, (g) unstructured learning experience, (h) incomplete learning cycle, and (i) less conducive to teamwork (Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013). Requiring students to participate in an internship would require administrative expertise, a large network of employers (Divine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007), and a dedicated staff to coordinate student assignments which could be very costly to "smaller schools and programs, or for schools located in rural areas" (Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013, p. 617).

Experiential learning projects, on the other hand, have benefits that outweigh drawbacks. Kosnik, Tingle, and Blanton (2013) found that projects (a) can be integrated into the course material; (b) they promote collaboration; (c) involve concentrated learning experiences; (d) include faculty guidance and structure; (e) require a smaller pool of client organizations; (f) are

driven by the project and not the organization; and (g) involve a shorter time frame and an explicit assessment of learning outcomes. Drawbacks include a shorter length of exposure and limited involvement in the host organization (Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013); however, these projects offer some of the same advantages as internships while helping students stay on track to receive employment offers upon graduation (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008).

Experiential learning typifies the AACSB directives of innovation, impact, and engagement while providing students with the opportunity for both personal and professional growth (Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013). In addition, Generation Y has shown a preference toward experiential learning as an educational tool, therefore, warranting increased attention on this teaching technique to ensure that learning expectations are addressed and met (Kumar & Bhandarker, 2017). With an anticipated 25 million vacant jobs in the U.S. by 2020 (Friefeld, 2013), business schools are finding ways to incorporate creative experiential learning activities that not only enhance soft skills (Alon, 2003; Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005; Riddle, 2003) but yield positive employment outcomes for graduates.

**Employment Outlook**

Careers for business school graduates are varied, extend into multiple industries, and demonstrate a wide range in salary.  According to the Collegiate Employment Research Institute (2015), the average starting salary for a recent business school graduate was just over $47,000 while students with an MBA saw salaries above $62,000. Salaries continue to increase; however, many students still enter the workforce with the challenge of paying back large student loan debts (Boyington, 2015). Despite these circumstances, the employment outlook for recent business graduates remains solid demonstrating a renewed confidence in the quality of business education (Graduate Management Admission Council, 2015; Thurston, 2015).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the business occupation groups with the highest paying jobs and the highest projected growth in job openings between 2014 and 2024 include business operations, financial specialist, management, and sales (Torpey, 2016). Students seeking employment in the business operations category are typically responsible for daily activities within an organization. Those tasks often include human resources, logistics, research, and analysis (Torpey, 2016). In 2014, management analyst, an occupation within the business operations category, reported the highest rate of job growth and 200,000 jobs projected over the next 8 years (Torpey, 2016). Torpey (2016) found that financial analyst, the largest career option for job seekers in the financial specialist space, earn higher wages than other employees in their companies. However, accountants and auditors have been projected to experience the most rapid growth in job openings for financial specialist between 2014 and 2024 (Torpey, 2016). Marketing and sales management jobs showed the most growth in the management field with more than 172,000 jobs projected over the next eight years. According to Torpey (2016), wholesale and manufacturing sales representatives dominated the workforce in 2014 with more than 1.8 million jobs and more than a half million positions projected by 2024.

The business degree continues to be one of the most popular majors in postsecondary education (Kensing, 2014; Torpey, 2016). Between 1970 and 2014, the number of bachelor degrees in business tripled (Torpey, 2016). According to Stockwell, (2014), many students choose business as a major because of their desire to one day manage their own business. Regardless of the reason, the increase in business degrees presents positive results for today's competitive workforce.

A survey conducted by the Graduate Management Admission Council (2015) found that 96% of employers felt the graduate business degree added more value to their company

providing more opportunities and salaries for students pursuing advanced education (Graduate Management Admission Council, 2015). A graduate degree is certainly not a requirement to secure a profitable career in business; however, Torpey (2016) noted that a solid education should also be accompanied by good interpersonal skills, strong work ethic, analytical ability, work experience, a strong networking ability, and humility in order for business school graduates to truly succeed in business careers.

**Future of Business Education Curricula**

Despite the issues that have plagued business education over the last few years, great strides have been made in the implementation of reform initiatives. The numbers of business schools have grown; enrollment and graduation rates have increased; and the economic impact of business education has seen lucrative returns for both institutions and professors (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Elsaid and Schermerhorn (1991) identified three concepts that could help to improve the quality of today's business education: (a) reduce the number of required business courses; (b) become more innovative on the issue of curriculum integration; and (c) hire faculty from a variety of disciplines to provide a broader educational experience for the students served. Some scholars believe that business faculty lack experience in non-academic areas making it difficult for them to share knowledge from a 'hands-on', more 'real-world' approach (Elsaid & Schermerhorn, 1991). Classroom visits are not enough. Instead, Elsaid and Schermerhorn (1991) suggest that companies institutionalize internships to provide professional development opportunities for faculty that lack these types of experiences.

As the landscape of business education changes, schools will need to address teaching methods, research trends, and institutional structure in order for the discipline to thrive. Areas of teaching improvement include using real-world challenges in the classroom; blending practice

and research-based faculty and topics; encouraging co-teaching; including industry professionals

as guest speakers; involving students in the creation of educational content; and encouraging

teamwork by incentivizing leadership and creativity (Schoemaker, 2008). Conducting long-

term, team-based research could help to provide focus on specific problems that managers face

on a daily basis (Schoemaker, 2008). Schoemaker (2008) found that many business issues are

multifaceted requiring in-depth team research in order to be of significant value. In addition,

rethinking our view of business school as more than just a place, but a "set of complex

stakeholder relationships" could encourage new research and improve teaching as a whole

(Schoemaker, 2008; p. 128). While some recommendation may seem ambitious, they

demonstrate the current state of business education and how globalization, distance education,

and competition can influence these changes.

**Globalization.** Globalization is a "process of change within educational institutions

extending the reach of educational engagement beyond one's home borders and deepening the

richness of understanding about the increasingly global foundation of business" (AACSB

International, 2011, p. 7). AACSB International (2016) has recognized globalization as an

integral part of business education able to change the trajectory of the discipline. As a result,

efforts to globalize business education should produce more research; better relationships and

service in the profession; and more confident graduates with the competence to successfully

impact business in global markets (AACSB International, 2011). According to Aggarwal (2008),

the influx of technology makes globalization easier while increasing the value and availability of

technological resources that are being developed across the world.

Visits to other countries, campuses on multiple continents, high percentages of foreign

students, and insertion of cultural content into the curriculum are important; however, these

activities alone do not justify an institution's claim that they provide a global business education (AACSB International, 2011; Schoemaker, 2008). Differences in mission and institutional environment make it difficult to prescribe a set of globalization standards that all business schools must adhere (AACSB International). Instead, those unique qualities require that each school develop a "customized approach to globalization" based on their "unique set of circumstances" (AACSB International, 2011, p. 8).

AACSB International (2011) identified the curriculum as "the most important area in which business schools should focus their globalization related efforts" (p. 25). However, the development of curriculum and teaching strategies that support globalization presents complexities that academia must address (Elsaid & Schermerhorn, 1991; Starbird & Powers, 2013). Global business education crosses multiple disciplines and involves the integration of non-business topics. Many deans find it difficult to motivate faculty to work together across disciplines and agree on teaching strategies that meet the needs of the students and faculty (Starbrid & Powers, 2013). By creating a common set of goals that address the development of higher order reasoning skills and then deciding on teaching strategies that will help achieve those goals, business schools will be better equipped to implement an international business curriculum that addresses the concern for the globalization of business and management (Starbrid & Powers, 2013). Zammuto (2008) found that business programs in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, attract over 40% of the total international enrollments. With this knowledge, it becomes imperative that faculty work together inside their unique environments to develop a consistent, comprehensive, and effective curriculum with the ability to successfully impact business development in global markets.

**Distance Education.** Business has been identified as the largest and most popular academic discipline in the use of distance learning to advance business education. (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Zammuto, 2008).

> The terms '*distance education*,' '*online learning*,' and '*distance learning'* are often interchangeably used to describe the process of providing formal instruction to students in such a way that the instructor and the student can be separated by geography, time or both. (Mascreen, Pai P., & Pai, 2012, p. 689)

Online elements serve as the highlight while the face-to-face interaction is minimal or non-existent (Aviles & Eastman, 2014). More than half of all business schools offer distance learning options, and annual growth in online enrollment is expected to increase more than 10% for the next decade (Curran, 2008; Zammuto, 2008). The delivery of educational content via the Internet saw significant growth in the late 1990s and has since become a way of life that business schools across the country have embraced. Research has shown that distance learning can be cost-effective; flexible; and equal to or superior to the learning outcomes of face-to-face delivery (Estelami, 2014).

Estelami (2014) asserted that business education has a different focus from other disciplines requiring educators to teach skills that help organizations become more efficient, effective, and competitive. Technology has proven itself to be an effective tool for addressing various workforce concerns; therefore, business educators have been pressured to utilize distance learning techniques to prepare future employees to handle issues that may warrant the use of such electronic means (Estelami, 2014). According to Ransdell, Kent, Gaillard-Kenney, and Long (2011), online learning allows participants to actively participate in feedback that fosters the improvement of both technical and communication skills. The sheer familiarity and

convenience of technology make it a catalyst to increase faculty usage and enrollment numbers as the demand for online learning in business education increases (Zammuto, 2008). The convenience of online education could be the catalyst to increase enrollments; however, it is important that business education stay abreast of the rapidly changing technological advances that help drive this growth.

**Competition.** Corporate universities *(or corporate training institutions)* gained recognition in the 1980s when businesses began creating training and development functions to keep employees aware of the changing business environment (Rademakers, 2014; Zammuto, 2008).  By the 1990s, 1600 corporate universities existed, and today that number has grown to more than 2400 (Nixon & Helms, 2002). This *'do-it-yourself'* approach to education has expanded, and some of the most famous examples are General Motors GM Institute, McDonald's Hamburger University, and General Electric's Crotonville. Growth in corporate universities has been linked to several reasons including a desire to make training more systematic within the organization (Nixon & Helms, 2002) and to remain competitive in the employment space (Dillich, 2000). Companies have recognized the value of their employees bring and have invested resources into developing corporate universities that help employees work effectively within their individual organizations (Rademakers, 2014).

According to Hearn (2014), traditional colleges and universities are not threatened by the increase in corporate universities. More than 20% of the financial support that higher education receives each year comes from voluntary corporate funding (Hearn, 2014). In addition, both entities have different objectives and different competition that function within their own space (Zammuto, 2008). Many corporate universities are identified as schools, colleges, or academies operating as a functioning business unit with a specific strategic plan (Rademaker (2014).

Objectives of corporate universities are linked to the corporation's vision and mission while the objectives of the traditional business school are linked to the institution's vision and mission. An area of future concern may include the corporate university desire to receive the same type of accreditation sought by traditional colleges and universities (Nixon & Helms, 2002).

Both educational entities serve different populations, address different needs, and have differing objectives; therefore, it is unlikely that one or the other will ever become a major threat (Zammuto, 2008). Instead, for-profit educational programs pose more of a threat to traditional business education because of their status as a *'big business'* (Zammuto, 2008). The University of Phoenix, operated by Apollo Group, is the largest for-profit institution and the largest provider of business education worldwide with revenues exceeding $2.25 billion in 2005 (Zammuto, 2008). Other large for-profit companies with institutions providing business education include Kaplan, Inc., DeVry, Inc., and Career Education Corporation. "Big business has already discovered business education, and it would not be easy for corporate universities to enter this market" (Zammuto, 2008, p. 259). As the need for skilled employees increases, our nation will continue to see more innovative programs that successfully merge education and industry.

**Summary**

The work of Gordon, Howell, Porter, and McKibbin played a significant role in the current direction of undergraduate business education; however, more changes are imminent with the increasing focus on helping students gain work experience. Internships not only provide practical connections between classroom knowledge and the workplace (Hergert, 2009; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008), but they also have the ability to positively impact higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking, decision making, and problem-solving (Griffis, 2014). With this

knowledge, the growing competition in educational options, and the demands of the workforce, internships present a feasible solution to improve student outcomes.

More research is necessary to determine how to effectively implement internships into the business school curriculum (Gerken, Rienties, Giesbers, & Konings, 2012). However, Hodge, Proudford, and Holt (2014) assert that the business school of the future must first acknowledge the level of importance that experiential learning has gained in this space. In addition, they must recognize its ability to influence change in a variety of settings and situations that go beyond an individual student. Elsaid and Schermerhorn (1991) noted that in order for business schools to be uniquely great, they must acknowledge the past, have a vision for the future, and be open to the ideas of others.

Research shows that students appreciate the benefits that internship programs provide (Hergert, 2009); however, it becomes incumbent that the institution and the employer identify and create programs that are most appropriate for the population of students being served. This research will fill gaps in the literature by informing the reader of current internship practices at an individual institution and use those practices to provide a broader view of how internship programs can be planned to fit the needs of the next generation of business school graduates. Chapter three provides an expanded outline of the research design.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

**Introduction**

The purpose of this case study was to describe, analyze, and draw conclusions about internships in undergraduate business education at an AACSB accredited business school at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. According to administrators and employers, what is the role and structure of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University?

2. According to administrators, employers, and students, what are the benefits and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University?

3. Based on the perspectives of administrators, employers, and students, what are the challenges of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University?

In this chapter, I address (a) research design and rationale, (b) research methods, (c) data collection procedures, (d) data analysis techniques, (e) the role of the researcher, (f) trustworthiness, (g) study limitations and delimitations, and (h) ethical considerations.

**Research Design and Rationale**

The overall purpose of this qualitative study was to explore administrator, employer, and student perceptions of internships in undergraduate business education. Qualitative research has been widely used in higher education to explore educational practices (Creswell, 2013; Merriam,

2002). The qualitative case study design was chosen because it allows people to make meaning of their own experiences. Case studies evolve over time, focus on context, and comprise an intensive amount of detail and depth (Flyvbjerg, 2011). This case study allowed the use of various data sources enabling me to explore the issues from multiple viewpoints for better understanding and more disclosure (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

This research is most closely aligned with the viewpoints presented by Merriam. Merriam (2009) follows a constructivist tradition that views qualitative research as a form of study that embraces an individual's ability to create their own reality through interaction with the surrounding world. She posits that "there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9) and that qualitative researchers are fascinated by how people make meaning of the world around them. Therefore, qualitative researchers "do not find knowledge, they construct it" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9) by developing another interpretation of their findings based on "others views filtered through his or her own" (Merriam, 1998, p. 23). This study can be characterized as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic meaning that it focused on a specific program; the results are a thorough description of that program; and the outcome will heighten the reader's understanding of the program being examined (Merriam, 2009).

While multiple paradigms would have been appropriate for this study, I identified most closely with the constructivist view and the philosophical assumptions presented by Merriam. In sum, by adopting the constructivist paradigm for a qualitative, single case study, I was able to provide the most depth in my investigation. Thus, the use of this research design was most appropriate.

Contextual teaching and learning, situated learning, work-based learning, and cognitive apprenticeships served as the constructivist theories of learning guiding my research methodology.  By using these theories, I was able to select appropriate research procedures and develop applicable interview questions for each of the populations under study. Careful selection in these areas aided in my ability to better understand the role, benefits, and challenges of internships in undergraduate business education through viewpoints presented by administrators, students, and employers.

**Research Setting**. Founded in 1851, Grant University is a large research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States with a student population of more than 40,000. Minority students account for 40% of the population with Hispanic students dominating at 17% followed by Black students at 8% (see Table 3). With more than 14,000 total employees and 351-degree programs, Grant University maintains its status as an elite research institution.

**Table 3.** *Spring 2017 University Student Enrollment by Race and Gender*

| Race | Female | Male | Total | % Total |
|------|--------|------|-------|---------|
| American Indian or Native Alaskan | 56 | 35 | 91 | .23% |
| Asian | 525 | 466 | 991 | 2.46% |
| Black | 2161 | 1188 | 3349 | 8.32% |
| Hispanic | 4008 | 3180 | 7188 | 17.86% |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 29 | 21 | 50 | .12% |
| Non-Resident Alien | 1058 | 1123 | 2181 | 5.42% |
| Not Reported | 322 | 344 | 666 | 1.66% |
| Two or More races | 705 | 521 | 1226 | 3.05% |
| White | 13442 | 11055 | 24497 | 60.88% |
| **Total** | **22,306** | **17,933** | **40,239** | **100%** |

*Source:* Grant University Office of Institutional Research

The 67-year old College of Business is AACSB accredited and recognized as one of the largest business schools in the nation with an undergraduate population of more than 6000. During the Spring 2017 semester, 6,359 students were enrolled representing 69% White, 17% Hispanic, and 4% Black (See Table 4). The College consists of the following six academic departments: accounting; business analytics, information systems and supply chain; finance; management; marketing; and risk management/insurance, real estate and legal studies. These departments offer a total of 10 undergraduate degree programs: accounting, finance, human resource management, management, management information systems, marketing, professional sales, real estate, retail management, and risk management/insurance. During the Fall 2017 semester, finance maintained the highest undergraduate enrollment with 1,816 followed by marketing at 1,303.

**Table 4.** Spring 2017 Grant University College of Business Student Enrollment by Race and Gender

| Race | Female | Male | Total | % Total |
|------|--------|------|-------|---------|
| American Indian or Native Alaskan | 2 | 11 | 13 | .2% |
| Asian | 61 | 76 | 137 | 2.15% |
| Black | 148 | 149 | 297 | 4.67% |
| Hispanic | 433 | 669 | 1102 | 17.33% |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 4 | 1 | 5 | .079% |
| Non-Resident Alien | 103 | 85 | 188 | 2.96% |
| Not Reported | 33 | 54 | 87 | 1.37% |
| Two or More Races | 66 | 90 | 156 | 2.45% |
| White | 1706 | 2668 | 4374 | 68.78% |
| **Total** | **2556** | **3803** | **6359** | **100%** |

*Source:* Grant University Office of Institutional Research

I chose this college because of its current standing as an AACSB accredited business school at a large research 1 institution, its size, and its concentrated efforts to incorporate internships into the curriculum. Currently, each academic department within the College of Business has at least one corresponding internship course that can count as either an elective credit toward the student's major or as general elective credit toward overall graduation hours. These factors, along with AACSB's emphasis on the need for dramatic changes to occur in the business school curriculum in order for industry and academia to work together to meet the needs of the global workforce (Shuayto, 2012), provide insight into why this institution was selected.

**Context of the Case.** With the creation of the college's internships & career services office, came the following nine internship courses: Accounting Internship (ACG 4941), Finance Internship (FIN 4941), General Business Internship (GEB 4941), Graduate Business Internship Course (GEB 5944); Field Study in Management Information Systems (ISM 4941), Field Study in Management (MAN 4941), Marketing & Professional Sales Internship (MAR 4941), Real Estate Internship (REE 494), and Risk Management and Insurance Internship (RMI 4941). Although each course is housed within their corresponding departments, they are managed and administered by the college's internship and career services office. Eight of the internship courses are offered as elective credit. The only major that currently requires an internship is Professional Sales. Those students must take the Marketing and Professional Sales internship course (MAR 4941) in order to graduate. This course and the Risk Management and Insurance (RMI 4941) internship course, are the only two courses that are letter graded A-F. All other internship courses are graded on a pass/fail basis (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory). Therefore, the grade will not affect the student's GPA but will add credit hours. Each internship course has its

own set of guidelines and requirements. Table 5 shows in detail the guidelines and requirements

for each course offered.

**Table 5.** Internship Guidelines and Requirements

| Major | Course Number | Guidelines & Requirements |
|---|---|---|
| Accounting | Accounting Internship (ACG 4941) | • Students must have completed ACG 4632 (Auditing Theory and Application I) and Tax 4001 (Federal Tax Accounting I).<br>• Accounting internships do not count as elective credit within the Accounting major. They do, however, count toward the 36 hours of accounting required by the State of Florida for CPA licensure.<br>• All Accounting internships are overseen by the Internship Programs Office through a Blackboard course. |
| Finance | Finance Internship (FIN 4941) | • Students must have completed FIN 3403 (Financial Management of the Firms) and FIN 3244 (Financial Markets, Institutions, and Intl. Finance Systems).<br>• Finance internships do not count as elective credit within the Finance major. They do, however, count as general elective credit toward the 120 hours required for the degree.<br>• All Finance internships are overseen by the Internship Programs Office through a Blackboard course. |
| All Majors *(business related internship required)* | General Business Internship (GEB 4941) | • There are no course prerequisites for the General Business Internship course.<br>• General Business internships do not count as elective credit within a business major. They do, however, count as general elective credit toward hours required to graduate.<br>• The General Business internship can be taken for variable credit 0 – 3 hours and is overseen by the Internship Programs Office through a Blackboard course.<br>• This course can be taken by any student with a verified business-related internship. |
| Graduate Business *(e.g. MBA, MACC))* | Graduate Business Internship (GEB 5944) | • There are no course prerequisites for the Graduate Business Internship.<br>• Students must be formally admitted to the MBA program or MAcc program. |

**Table 5 (Continued)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | **MBA Guidelines**<br>• MBA internships count as elective credit within the MBA major.<br>• Students may count only three (3) credit hours from internship toward completion of the MBA degree.<br>• The MBA Program Director will review all MBA internship applications to determine if the internship is substantive and worthy of approval.<br>• The Internship Program's Office will notify students of the decision and next steps, if applicable.<br><br>**MAcc Guidelines**<br>• MAcc internships count only as non-accounting electives toward the MAcc degree.<br>• Students may count up to six (6) credit hours from internship toward completion of the MAcc degree (e.g. Participate in two separate internships over the course of two semesters for 3 credit hours each or continue with the same internship into an additional semester for 3 credits each term.)<br>• The Accounting department will review all MAcc internship requests to determine if the internship is substantive and eligible for approval.<br>• The Internship Program's Office will notify students of the Accounting Department's decision and next steps, if applicable.<br>• All Graduate Business Internships are overseen by the Internship Programs Office through an online Blackboard course. |
| Management | Field Study in Management (MAN 4941) | • Students must have completed 6 credit hours of Management, HR, or general business core courses including Organizational Behavior (MAN 3240).<br>• Management internships count as elective credit within the Management and HR majors.<br>• All Management internships are overseen by the Internship Programs Office through a Blackboard course. |
| Management Information Systems (MIS) | Field Study in MIS (ISM 4941) | • Students must have successfully completed ISM 4212 (Information for Operating Control and Data Management) prior to enrolling in the MIS internship course. |

**Table 5 (Continued)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • MIS internships count as elective credit within the Management Information Systems majors.<br>• MIS internships are overseen by the Internship Programs Office through a Blackboard course. |
| Marketing & Professional Sales | Marketing & Professional Sales Internship (MAR 4941 | • Students must have completed 6 credit hours of Marketing/Sales courses. Those courses must include Basic Marketing Concepts (MAR 3023) and at least one other 3 credit hour general business core requirement course for sales/marketing majors. In addition, Professional Sales Majors must also have completed MAR 3400 (Professional Selling).<br>• This course counts as elective credit within the Marketing major. It is a required course for students majoring in Professional Sales.<br>• All Marketing and Professional Sales internships are overseen by the Internship Programs Office through a Blackboard course. |
| Real Estate | Real Estate Internship (REE 4941) | • There are no course prerequisites for a Real Estate internship.<br>• Real Estate internships do not count as elective credit within the Real Estate major. They do, however, count as general elective credit towards the 120 hours required for the degree.<br>• Real Estate internships are overseen by the Internship Programs Office. |
| Risk Management/Insurance | Risk Management & Insurance Internship (RMI 4941) | • Students must have completed 9 credit hours of business/risk management and insurance courses, including RMI 3011 (Risk Management and Insurance).<br>• Students must work at least 6 weeks and 250 hours.<br>• RMI internships count as elective credit within the major.<br>• RMI internships are approved and overseen by the Internship Programs Office |

*Source:* Grant University College of Business

Each of the internship courses administered through the internship and career services office has identical assignment requirements. Courses are designed to allow the students to reflect on their experience as it relates to the student's major and the tasks being performed. Therefore, although assignments are similar, responses will be individualized to the student's internship situation. Assignments include, but are not limited to, learning objectives, a professional development quiz, a mid-term employer evaluation, a supervisor interview, a series of discussion board topics covering challenges, rewarding experiences, and lessons learned, and final evaluations from the employer and student. Courses are administered online using the Canvas Learning Management System, and each course contains a detailed syllabus with rubrics for each assignment.

A typical internship within the College requires the student to work at least six weeks and 120 hours in a relevant internship position in order to be approved to enroll in an academic internship course. Risk Management and Insurance majors are required to complete at least six weeks and 250 hours during the internship semester. Courses cannot be repeated, but multiple courses can be taken if the student has multiple internships and meets the course enrollment requirements. Enrollment in an internship course is open to all students at the university as long as they meet the guidelines and requirements set forth by the corresponding academic department. Table 6 provides a sample of brief internship descriptions for majors within each of the six academic departments.

In 2015, Grant University implemented a university-wide *Liberal Studies for the 21st Century* curriculum with a goal of equipping students with the skills necessary to thrive intellectually and engage critically within their communities.  The Liberal Studies curriculum includes general education courses taken during the first two years, university-wide courses

taken during the upper division, and premiere courses mixed throughout that are referred to as *E-Series* and *Scholarship-in-Practice*. Those signature courses provide students with an opportunity to be creative and work closely with faculty while gaining hands-on learning experiences. *Scholarship-in-Practice* courses allow students to engage in the application of critical thinking skills to a specific field of study. To fulfill this requirement, students must take two courses. One of those courses can include a formative, or applied experience. Formative experiences can include an internship, study abroad program, or other international experience. Each of the internship courses within the Grant University College of Business has been formally recognized by the university as formative experiences. The institution's commitment to preparing students for 21st-century careers through the engagement and expansion of various forms of experiential learning is also highlighted in the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan.

**Table 6.** Sample Internship Descriptions

| Related Academic Department | Intern Title | Sample Job Duties |
|---|---|---|
| Accounting | Accounting Intern | Interns work with large and small companies in various industries to develop strong working relationships. Interns will draft financial statements under prescribed formats; develop an understanding of the audit approach and tools; and perform substantive tests of internal controls to identify and resolve accounting or reporting issues. |
| Finance | Finance Intern | Intern will assist with treasury reporting and analysis; project work; updating bank fee analysis; and supporting global business service efforts. Intern will also gain an understanding of treasury management, project management, relationship building, and networking. |
| Business Analytics, Information Systems and Supply Chain | Information Systems Intern | Intern will assist in project specific xml configuration and configuration verification. Student must have foundational skills in this area and a knowledge of the software configuration process for law enforcement agencies. |
| Management | Human Resources Intern | This internship will focus on the HR function while learning and contributing to specialist HR areas. Those areas include understanding of the HR Business Partnership; the reward cycles; learning and development function; performance |

**Table 6 (Continued)**

| | | review process; and talent acquisition within a global organization. |
|---|---|---|
| Marketing | Marketing & Sales Intern | Intern will conduct research on target accounts; assist in social media campaigns; assist with sales meetings; and demonstrate a fundamental understanding of telephone prospecting |
| Risk Management/Insurance, Real Estate and Legal Studies | RMI Intern | The intern will conduct support activities for claims related audits and will perform some independent audits subject to direction and assistance from a senior auditor. The intern will learn how to use the Claims Management System 9CMS); methodology and skills related to conducting audits; basic claims operations business process; and how the claims department interacts with other departments. |

**Participants.** Participants in this study were administrators employed within the Grant University College of Business; business students that have recently participated in an internship experience and received academic credit through enrollment in an online internship course; and employers that provide internship opportunities to business students within the college. Participation in the study was completely voluntary using the purposive, or purposeful, sampling strategy. According to Merriam (2009), purposive sampling is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). Therefore, the purposive, or purposeful, sampling strategy was the most appropriate technique for this study.

The selection of administrators was driven by the fact that each department has a role in the development of internship guidelines and requirements for their respective area. In addition, these administrators interact in some capacity with the internships and career services office to assist students and employers in making quality internship connections. The College has nine internship courses representing six academic departments. Therefore, an administrator from each of the six academic departments was identified and invited to participate. Initial invitations were sent by email (see Appendix A). The Dean of the College and the Associate Dean for

Undergraduate Programs were selected based on their leadership roles, years of experience, and knowledge of internship programs within the College and beyond (See Table 7).

The selection of employers was driven by the fact that each company consistently provided internship opportunities to students in each of the six academic departments within the College. Invited employers were included in the study based on the following selection criteria: (a) work full-time, (b) have maintained an established intern recruiting relationship with the College for the last two years, (c) use at least one of the following recruiting tool to secure interns (e.g. career fairs, job postings, classroom visits) and (d) focus, either, primarily on a specific business discipline or multiple business majors (See Table 8.)

**Table 7.** Demographic Characteristics of Research Participants - Administrators

| Pseudonym | Sex | Research Category | Ethnicity | Employment Category | Age Group | Years of Experience | Department |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Frank | M | Administrator | White | Associate Professor | 55-64 | 21 & over | Finance |
| Matthew | M | Administrator | White | Teaching Faculty; Center Director | 45-54 | Over 21 | Management |
| Abigail | F | Administrator | White | Teaching Faculty | 65 & Over | 5-10 | Risk Management/ Insurance, Real Estate and Legal Studies |
| Ingrid | F | Administrator | White | Associate Professor | 45-54 | 21 & over | Business Analytics, Information Systems, & Supply Chain |
| Thomas | M | Administrator | White | Teaching Faculty | 65 & Over | 21 & over | Marketing |
| Mary | F | Administrator | (Mixed) Asian & White | Teaching Faculty | 35-44 | 16-20 | Accounting |
| Jason | M | Associate Dean | White | Dean | 55-64 | 21 & over | Business Analytics, Information |

**Table 7 (Continued)**

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | Systems, & Supply Chain |
| Donald | M | Dean | White | Dean | 45-54 | 21 & over | Marketing |

The selection of students was driven by the student's previous internship experience and enrollment in an online internship course. Five students, representing six majors were selected to participate in a focus group in order to provide insight on the benefits, intended outcomes, and challenges of internships in undergraduate business education. Undergraduate business students received an email invitation inviting them to participate in a focus group to share their perception

**Table 8.** Demographic Characteristics of Research Participants – Employers

| Pseudonym | Sex | Research Category | Ethnicity | Employment Category | Age Group | Years of Experience | Industry |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amanda | F | Employer | White | Realtor/Executive Assistant | 25-34 | 5-10 | Real Estate |
| Paul | M | Employer | White | Corporate Communications and Outreach Director | 35-44 | 21 & over | Software//IT |
| Jeffrey | M | Employer | White | Senior Tax Accountant | 25-34 | 11-15 | Accounting |
| Daniel | M | Employer | White | President | 35-44 | 11-15 | Market Research |
| Gavin | M | Employer | White | Financial Advisor | 25-34 | 5-10 | Finance |
| John | M | Employer | White | Manager | 35-44 | 11-15 | Supply Chain |

of internships in undergraduate business education. From those respondents, five students representing six majors were chosen to participate. Invited students were included in the study based on the following selection criteria: (a) full-time student, (b) have participated in at least one internship experience while in college, and (c) have completed at least one online internship course (See Table 9.)

**Table 9.** Demographic Characteristics of Research Participants – Students

| Pseudonym | Sex | Research Category | Ethnicity | Major | Age Group | Class | Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Christopher | M | Student | Black | HR Management | 15-24 | Senior | Full-time |
| Isabella | F | Student | Hispanic | Accounting | 15-24 | Senior | Full-time |
| Anna | F | Student | White | Finance | 15-24 | Senior | Full-time |
| Jill | F | Student | Hispanic/ White | RMI & Sales | 15-24 | Senior | Full-time |
| Dylan | M | Student | White | Marketing & Sales | 15-24 | Senor | Full-time |

**Research Methods**

In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of how administrators, students, and employers perceive internships in undergraduate business education, this study employed multiple data collection procedures including individual interviews, document reviews, and a focus group (See Table 10).

**Table 10.** Data Collection Procedures

| Procedure | # of Participants | Length | Location | Timeframe |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individual Interviews (14) | 8 Administrators<br><br>6 Employers | 1 hour | Participant Office | November – December 2017 |
| Focus Groups (1) | 5 Students | 2 hours | College Conference Room | February 2018 |
| Document Review (e.g. syllabi, website, employer and student policy manual, recruiter guide, course syllabi, strategic plan) | N/A | Continuous | College & Online | November 2017 – February 2018 |

These multiple sources of evidence helped to triangulate the data to increase the reliability of the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that conducting qualitative research

requires an ethical investigation to ensure validity and reliability. The following section will explain the strengths and weaknesses of each procedure.

**Interviews.** Face-to-face interviews are the most common form of interviewing in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Patton (2015), "the purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 426). Feelings and behavior cannot be observed; therefore, interviewing provides an opportunity to better understand the meanings that individuals develop from the activities around them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).  In this study, 14 face-to-face interviews were conducted.

Interviews can be categorized in many ways; however, the three most common approaches are structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, I used the semi-structured interview approach. Semi-structured, or guided, interviews allow the interviewer an opportunity to develop a standard set of questions for each participant while still providing flexibility to modify questions and the order for the purposes of probing more deeply while clarifying key points (Lichtman, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured interviews also guide the researcher on how to respond to the interview situation as it evolves with ideas that may be new to the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I developed a semi-structured interview protocol for both administrators and employers involved in this study. Questions included in the protocol followed a pattern of general to specific comprising the following three domains: role and structure of internships, benefits and outcomes of internships, and challenges of internships (See Appendices H, I, & J). Roulston (2010) found that open-ended questions "provide broad parameters within which interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer" (p. 5).

By using this approach, additional follow-up *(or probing)* questions can be generated to provide further detail (Roulston, 2010).

After developing the first draft of questions, I received feedback from professors. Based on that feedback, I reduced the number of questions and created updated versions of both documents. Administrators eligible to participate in an interview were those who: (a) work full - time, (b) have a role in the development of internship guidelines and requirements for their respective academic departments, and (c) have worked in some capacity with the internships and career services office to assist students and employers in making quality internship connections. Employers eligible to interview (a) work full-time, (b) have maintained an established intern recruiting relationship with the College for the last two years, (c) use at least one of the following recruiting tool to secure interns (e.g. career fairs, job postings, classroom visits) and (d) either focus primarily on a specific business discipline or multiple business majors. Eligible administrators and employers for this study were invited to participate via email (see Appendix A). Upon agreement, each participant received detailed information on the nature of the study (see Appendix C). The interview date, time, and location were established based on the participant's availability and preferences. Outlook calendar invitations were sent to each participant to solidify the meeting date, time, and location. Each administrator also received a reminder email prior to the interview date (see Appendix D). Table 11 shows the relationship of the research questions to the interview questions. By using the semi-structured interview approach, I made every effort to focus my attention on the interview questions outlined in each protocol; however, flexibility was incorporated to ensure that probing questions were asked when appropriate and necessary.

Fourteen individual interviews were conducted with eight administrators and six employers. The number of interviews was decided based on the college's leadership structure and the number of academic departments housed within the college. Specifically, the college has six academic departments and two Deans with expert knowledge of the internship program offered to undergraduate business students. Therefore, I found it most appropriate to include six administrators that represent each academic department, two deans, and six employers that consistently recruit interns from the departments listed. According to Lichtman (2013), the "goal of qualitative research is to describe and interpret rather than generalize" (p. 193). Therefore, the quantity of research participants is not as important as the richness of the data. The multiple sources of data collected for this study, the focus group, and the 14 individual interviews were sufficient in reaching data saturation.

**Table 11.** *Relationship of Research Questions to Interview Questions*

| Research Questions | Dean's Interview Questions | Administrator Interview Questions | Employer Interview Questions | Student Focus Group Questions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. According to administrators and employers, what is the role and structure of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University? | 1-2; 5-6 | 1, 4-5 | 1, 5 | |
| 2. According to administrators, employers, and students, what are the benefits and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University? | 4, 6 | 2, 4-5 | 1,3-5 | 1, 3-6 |
| 3. Based on the perspectives of administrators, employers, and students what are the challenges of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University? | 3, 6 | 3, 5 | 2, 5 | 2, 6 |

**Focus Group.** Focus groups allow interaction to occur while information is being shared (Lichtman, 2013). Group interaction distinguishes a focus group from an individual interview by allowing new ideas to emerge as a result of feedback provided by fellow participants (Lichtman, 2013). Group interaction is fundamental, and participants are encouraged to communicate directly with each other (Roulston, 2010). Views and opinions are shared with one another under the guidance of a moderator (Roulston, 2010). In this study, a student focus group was conducted as part of the data collection process. I developed a semi-structured interview protocol for students involved in this research. Questions included in the protocol followed a pattern of general to specific comprising the following two domains: role and structure of internships and benefits and outcomes of internships (See Appendix K). Roulston (2010) found that open-ended questions "provide broad parameters within which interviewees can formulate answers in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer" (p. 5). By using this approach, additional follow-up *(or probing)* questions can be generated to provide further detail (Roulston, 2010). Focus groups are not recommended for sensitive or highly personal topics; however, they are ideal for situations where individuals can talk about issues that occur in everyday life (Macnaghten & Meyers, 2004; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

After receiving feedback from my professors, I reduced the number of questions and created an updated version of the document. Students eligible to participate in the focus group were those who met the following selection criteria: (a) full-time student, (b) have participated in at least one internship experience while in college, and (c) have participated in an online internship course for academic credit.

Eligible students for this study were invited to participate via email. An email announcement was sent to students from each academic department that have participated in an

internship while enrolled in the College (see Appendix B). It was important to have students from multiple majors represented. Therefore, respondents to the focus group invitation where narrowed down by timeliness in their response to the invitation and major. Upon selection and agreement, each participant received detailed information on the nature of the study (see Appendix E). They were also asked to share their availability during a pre-determined week in February. From there, a date, time, and location were confirmed. One focus group was conducted with five students. A reminder email was sent the day before, and food was provided during the session (see Appendix F). Each student also received a $10 Chick-Fil-A gift card as a *thank you* gift at the end of the session. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) found that the composition of focus group depends on the topic while the number of participants can vary. The focus group lasted about two hours and provided sufficient time to reach data saturation. Table 11 shows the relationship of the research questions to the focus group questions. By using the semi-structured interview approach, I made every effort to focus my attention on the interview questions outlined in each protocol; however, flexibility was incorporated to ensure that probing questions were asked when appropriate and necessary.

**Document Review**. Documents are used for a variety of reasons in qualitative research. In case study research, documents help provide insight into events and activities that cannot be observed (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013). Hammersely and Atkinson (1983) found that documents have the following advantages:

1. Rich descriptions of events and activities are provided.

2. Relevant sources of information are available.

3. Each source has the ability to affect how individuals react.

4. Everyday situations can be presented in document format.

5.  Documents are easily accessible and ethical concerns are typically minimal.

In this study, I collected a variety of documents related to internship programs in the College of Business. These documents included the general business internship course syllabus, marketing and professional sales internship course syllabus, risk management and insurance internship course syllabus, student internship policy and procedures manual, employer policy and procedures manual, the college's strategic plan, the employer recruiter guide, and the internship office staff training manual. Website content was also reviewed and analyzed to broaden the scope of the investigation. The purpose of selecting these sources for review was to validate data received from interviews and the focus group. This review of documents also provided insight into the content of the College's online internship courses - content that cannot be visually observed. The student and employer policy and procedure manuals were also available online for public use. The course syllabi and staff training manual were accessed internally via Canvas, the online learning management system and via the College's internal document drive. Due to my position as an employee of the College, access to these items was readily available, and permission was granted. These documents also assisted in my comparison of student, employer, and administrator perceptions of how the online internship courses are outlined and described. Table 12 lists the documents used in this study, their distribution method, and their role in this study.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), data collection and analysis should occur simultaneously. By doing so, the researcher minimizes the difficulty in deciphering large volumes of material (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research can come from various resources; however, the most common forms of data collection in qualitative

**Table 12.** Documents Relevant to the Study

| Data Source | Distribution Method | Role of Document |
|---|---|---|
| General Business Internship Course Syllabus | Instructor and Internship Course Website | This document includes the most recent course requirements for students enrolled in the GEB, MAN, REE, ISM, ACG, or FIN 4941 internship course. |
| Marketing & Professional Sales Internship Course Syllabus | Instructor and Internship Course Website | This document includes the most recent course requirements for students enrolled in the MAR 4941 internship course. |
| Risk Management and Insurance Internship Course Syllabus | Instructor | This document includes the course requirements and most recent course assignments for students enrolled in the RMI 4941 internship course. |
| Student Internship Policy and Procedures Manual | Grant University College of Business Internship Website *(student page)* | This document describes the guidelines and requirements for students seeking internship opportunities and/or academic internship credit. |
| Employer Internship Policy and Procedures Manual | Grant University College of Business Internship Website *(employer page)* | This document describes the guidelines and requirements for employers seeking to secure an intern from the College. |
| Internship Staff Training Manual | Director of Internships & Career Service/Internal files | This document describes the guidelines and requirements for the daily operations and duties associated with the internship office. |
| College of Business Strategic Plan 2017-2022 | Grant University College of Business Website | This document provides a thorough review of the College's vision, mission, core values, and goals now through 2022. |
| Internship Recruiter Guide | Grant University College of Business Website | This document provides details on the benefits of employer internship participation and guidelines for recruiting a college of business student for an internship position. |

research includes interviews, observations, and document reviews (Merriam & Tisdell; 2016). For this study, I used interviews, a focus group, and document reviews as my primary sources of information. By using multiple sources of evidence, I was able to test the reliability of the data collected and gain rich descriptions regarding internships in undergraduate business education.

To maintain organization, I developed a data collection file and calendar. The file contained the names and contact information of administrators and employers that were eligible for a face-to-face interview as well as a list of relevant documents. Administrators eligible to be interviewed were: (a) full-time employees, (b) they represented their departments as key internship contacts, and (c) worked in some capacity with the internships and career services office to assist students and employers in making quality internship connections. Employers eligible to be interviewed were: (a) full time employees, (b) they maintained an established intern recruiting relationship with the College for the last 2 years, (c) used at least 1 of the following recruiting tools to secure interns (e.g., career fairs, job postings, classroom visits), and (d) focused, either primarily on a specific business discipline or multiple business majors. Eligible administrators and employers were contacted via email (see Appendix A) to request participation and schedule a date, time, and location. Once those items were solidified, they were added to my data collection calendar to maintain organization. A total of eight administrators and six employers were interviewed. Confirmation emails were sent to each interviewee (see Appendix C) that included the date, time, location, and the Informed Consent (see Appendices L, M, & N). Time and location were based on the interviewee's preference, and each session lasted no longer than one hour. I intentionally scheduled my interviews during the months of November and December to accommodate the flexibility that most of my participants, including myself, experienced during those winter months. After solidifying interview participant dates, times, and

locations, I added each session to my calendar and shared Outlook calendar invitations with each

participant to maintain organization and order. Interviews were audio recorded, *thank-you* emails

were provided (see Appendix O), and recordings were transcribed for the purpose of analyzing. I

used an online company called *Go Transcripts* to transcribe each interview session at the end of

each week of interviews. Once interviews were transcribed, I reviewed each transcript and

shared a copy with each participant for the purpose of member checking. Member checking

helps to ensure credibility, trustworthiness, and transparency (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stake,

2003). Participants were able to review their transcript and email me soon thereafter if any

modifications were necessary to ensure that the information I analyzed was an accurate

representation of each interviewees thoughts.

Coding was done manually using a notepad and post-it notes. Once participants

confirmed and/or made modifications to their transcript, I was able to analyze each document

individually to determine primary themes from each interview question.  As I reviewed

transcripts, I wrote down the most significant thoughts that emerged from each research

participant. Next, I compared those thoughts across categories *(e.g., administrator and employer)*

to determine which themes were shared by the majority of research participants in that group. I

then performed another comparison across categories to determine the themes that were most

prevalent among the groups as a whole.

The focus group was my second source of data. It consisted of five student participants

and provided a great opportunity for the students to share information while interacting in a

group setting (Lichtman, 2013). Students eligible to be interviewed were: (a) full-time students,

(b) had participated in at least 1 internship experience while in college, and (c) had received

academic credit for at least one internship experience. An email announcement was sent to

students from each academic department that had participated in an internship while enrolled in the College of Business (See Appendix B). Students that responded to the invitation were then narrowed by major to ensure that multiple areas were represented in the study. Upon selection, participants received the Informed Consent (see Appendix N) and were asked to provide a schedule of their availability during the last week in February so that a specific date, time, and location could be solidified. Once confirmed, email reminders (see Appendix F) were sent to each participant and the information was placed on my calendar to maintain order and organization. Another reminder was sent the day before (see Appendix F). The focus group was audio recorded, sandwiches were provided, a $10 Chick Fil-A gift card was given to each participant as a *thank you*, and the recording was transcribed for the purpose of analyzing. *Go Transcript* remained the online company of choice to transcribe the focus group session at the end of the week. Once the focus group was transcribed, I reviewed the material and shared a copy with each student participant for the purposes of member checking. Participants were able to review the transcript and email me soon thereafter if any modifications were necessary to ensure that the information I analyzed was an accurate representation of each participant's thoughts. Table 13 shows the timeline of data collection activities.

Coding for this procedure was also done manually using a notepad and post-it notes. Once participants confirmed and/or made modifications to the transcript, I was able to analyze the focus group document to determine primary themes from each participant's response to the questions that were asked. As I reviewed the transcript, I wrote down the most significant thoughts that emerged from each student's responses to each question. Next, I compared those thoughts by the question to determine which themes were shared by the majority of students. I

then performed another comparison of those themes with those that emerged from my interviews with administrators and employers.

After careful review of several documents, it became apparent that the documents most relevant for this study would include the course syllabi, college website, strategic plan, employer recruiting guide, and student/employer/staff policy manuals. These documents were available online through the college's website and within the online internship course site maintained through the Canvas Learning Management System. These documents were helpful supplements to the interview and focus group material and also provided a more detailed view into content that I was not able to visually observe.

**Table 13.** *Timeline of Data Collection Activities*

| Month | Activity |
|---|---|
| September | Proposal Defense Completed |
| October | IRB application submitted |
| November | IRB application approved on Nov. 15, 2017 |
| November – February | Eligible administrators and employers were contacted to schedule face-to-face interviews and a student focus group; Interviews were conducted; follow-up questions were sent to participants; Interviews were transcribed and member checks were conducted with each interview participant. Thank-you cards/gifts provided to administrator, student, and employer participants. |

As I manually searched for reoccurring themes (or patterns), I also maintained memos to document what I heard, observed, and how I interpreted the findings. By creating memos after each data collection procedure, I was able to compare findings and better prepare for subsequent interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Because this study explored

administrator, employer, and student perceptions of internships in undergraduate business

education, it was important for me to carefully read and re-read the data (e.g., interview

transcripts, documents) to assist in the development of themes and trends.

Contextual teaching and learning (CTL) was instrumental in guiding the data analysis

process. Because CTL focuses on making meaning and retaining material, I found it helpful in

my ability to understand my research participant's viewpoints and narrow down those thoughts

by focusing in on three of the eight components that encompass the CTL system: making

meaningful connections, critical and creative thinking, and using authentic assessment (Johnson,

2002).  As I analyzed the data, a comprehensive list of seven themes emerged that directly

aligned with my research questions.

My view of qualitative research aligns with the methodological perspectives of Sharan B.

Merriam and the constructivist paradigm which focuses on the idea that individuals create their

own knowledge through interaction with the surrounding world (Merriam, 2009; Yanzan, 2015).

This case was organized using a descriptive framework based on constructivist theories of

learning, ideas from the initial review of the literature, and guidelines drawn from the AACSB

standards for business school accreditation. Those strategies were also used to evaluate the

degree of program effectiveness and to draw conclusions.  I was interested in determining the

role, benefits, and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education.

Therefore, this paradigm helped to produce a meaningful interpretation of the findings (Merriam

& Tisdell, 2016; Merriam, 20009).

**Investigator Position**

In this study, I played a significant role in the data collection and data analysis process. I

served as a participant observer and the primary research instrument (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016;

Merriam, 2009).  I reviewed all documents relevant to the research questions, interviewed each research participant, organized and moderated the student focus group, and analyzed all material.

I strongly believe that internships play a significant role in a student's professional development and I encourage all students to participate. However, I recognize that resources, institutional type, location, and size can impact an institutions ability to require internships of all of its students. Therefore, I believe that a research-focused institution is able to infuse internships, and various other forms of experiential learning, into the curriculum while maintaining its academic rigor and producing students with skills that exceed those gained through classroom instruction.

My belief in the constructivist paradigm allowed me to merge my thoughts with those of my research participants in order to create an interpretation of the findings based on the construction of new knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As I made meaning of the case, I maintained an inquisitive mind and a "high tolerance for ambiguity" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 18). In addition, I maintained researcher memos, carefully observed my surroundings, asked good questions, practiced good communication skills, thought critically, and was comfortable with writing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Merriam, 2009).

As previously stated in Chapter 1, my current role as the Director of Internships & Career Services within the Grant University College of Business gave me a heightened understanding of how my previous experiences, biases, and general knowledge can affect my interpretation of the results. Therefore, I maintained a high awareness of these areas in order to establish my position as a consistently reliable researcher. According to Piantanida and Garman (2009), this approach is crucial to remain receptive to the ideas and experiences of others. My researcher journal, along with the knowledge that I have gained through participation in qualitative research courses, was

instrumental in my ability to produce a scholarly work that will positively contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

**Trustworthiness**

As a qualitative researcher, I recognize the importance of trustworthiness. Therefore, it was my goal to ensure that my findings were credible. Below, I will define internal validity and reliability and discuss how they were enhanced throughout this study.

### Internal Validity

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) noted that internal validity "deals with the question of how research findings match reality" (p. 242). Reality, however, is subjective in this research study. The constructivist orientation to learning reminds us that people do not discover knowledge, but knowledge is created (or constructed) through interactions with the outside world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016. Since reality is subjective, "*credibility,*" as it relates to the research findings, may be a more appropriate term (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam Webster's dictionary defines credibility as the "quality of being believed or accepted as true, real, or honest" (Credibility, n.d.). Credibility can be established through various attributes including triangulation and member checks. To verify my research, I employed the triangulation strategy. Triangulation of data allows the researcher to use multiple sources of data to confirm research findings. I used 4 theories, conducted 14 individual interviews, facilitated 1 focus group, and reviewed multiple program documents to produce an overall construct of my findings. In case study research, it is recommended that multiple viewpoints be explored when gathering data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Tracy (2010), scholars from various traditions consider triangulation a valuable research strategy regardless of differing paradigms. Triangulations also helped to reduce the effect of researcher bias (Shenton, 2004).

The process of member checking was incorporated after each data collection procedure. I emailed each participant a copy of his/her interview transcript and asked them to review for accuracy. Janesick (2012) encourages this type of member checking during data collection. If any edits were needed, participants were asked to respond electronically with any necessary changes or corrections. Lincoln and Guba (1985) found that member checking can be a crucial technique for establishing credibility in a research study.

**Reliability**

"Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 250). In a constructivist qualitative research study, there is no single reality. Therefore, the traditional belief that all research studies should be replicable is inappropriate. "While replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results, this does not discredit the results of any particular study; there can be numerous interpretations of the same data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 251). To ensure reliability in a qualitative research study, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) found that the most important question to ask is "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 251). Methods used in this study to ensure reliability include triangulation, investigator's position, and the audit trail. As mentioned previously, triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources. Data sources used for this study include four theories, 14 individual interviews, one focus group, and multiple program documents that aided in the construction of my findings. Thick descriptions and a thorough outline of my research design helped to document my audit trail. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) defined the audit trail as a "detailed account of how the study was conducted and how data were analyzed" (p. 253). Thick descriptions of the background data also helped to establish the context of the study (Shenton, 2004).

**Study Limitations and Delimitations**

This study was limited to an examination of internships in undergraduate business education at an AACSB accredited business school at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States. Conclusions and recommendations drawn may have relevance for other colleges and schools of business but reflect only the understanding gained from the intensive research obtained from a single case study of an undergraduate institution. No other institutions were represented, graduate students were not involved, and a comparative analysis of similar programs was not incorporated. These limitations were addressed by reviewing multiple sources of data and by staying focused on the institutional type and criteria that were established at the onset of this research. I also ensured that the data was related to the research on internships in business education outlined in the literature review.

This study is also limited in the sense that a single researcher collected, analyzed, and interpreted the results. In addition, the researcher is a participant observer who has been involved in the development and execution of internship programs within the college being studied. By acknowledging this relationship between researcher and subject, I was challenged to recognize my biases and how it could affect how I view and comprehend the data that was collected and the interpretation. My immersion in the program contributed richness beyond a typical research narrative and I was able to recognize the need to be open to the thoughts and opinions of others and to set aside my personal experiences to understand those of the research participants.

Finally, this study is also limited in the diversity of the research participants. The Grant University College of Business is a predominately white institution (PWI). Therefore, opportunities to diversify participants were scarce in regard to race, ethnicity, and gender. In my attempt to diversify employers, I found that intern supervisors in the industries that I researched

are typically Caucasian and male. I was challenged in my attempts to overcome these limitations, but I was able to acknowledge that information received by the participants involved was an accurate representation of the institution under study. Regardless of diversity, the research obtained is transferable across institutional type and demographic composition. For future, a study that involves more diverse institutions and employers would be helpful to determine what roles those factors play in internship development within undergraduate business education across institutions.

**Ethical Considerations**

The ethics of the investigator are of extreme importance to the validity and reliability of a research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) found that interviews and observations can present a separate set of challenges in qualitative research. Interviews can be unpredictable and have the ability to reveal sensitive information while observations bring about challenges with privacy issues when subjects are observed without their prior consent. To ensure that data collection was conducted in an ethical manner, I provided each participant with a detailed informed consent that clearly outlined the purpose, intent, and procedures used in this study. Participants were also given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Prior to each interview and focus group, I verbally summarized the details outlined in the informed consent and allowed for questions so that each participant was fully aware of the nature of this study prior to the start of the data collection procedure. All data was also secured in a locked office space. Tracy (2010) outlined four forms of ethics that should be observed in qualitative research: procedural ethics, situational ethics, and relational ethics, and exiting ethics. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) covers procedural ethics that outline the importance of truth, privacy, and confidentiality (Tracy, 2010). "Situational ethics refer to ethical practices that

emerge from a reasoned consideration of a context's specific circumstances" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). Relational ethics take into consideration respect for others (Tracy, 2010). By incorporating an "ethic of care" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847), I developed relationships with participants that yielded mutually beneficial results. Finally, exiting ethics describe behavior that takes place after data has been collected and research has been published (Tracy, 2010). Prior to submission, I shared my findings with the research participants to ensure accuracy in information and also formally thanked each participant with personalized *'thank you'* notes and small gifts *(e.g., holiday candy for administrator and employer participants and $10 Chick-Fil-A gift cards for student focus group participants).*

In this research, I was interested in how the participants view the role, challenges, and benefits of internships in undergraduate business education. My beliefs, the philosophical foundations of the paradigms used, and my concern for the ethical career of my research participants were essential in my ability to develop a meaningful research study.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I addressed the (a) research design and rationale, (b) research methods, (c) data collection procedures, (d) data analysis techniques, (e) the role of the researcher, (f) trustworthiness, (g) study limitations and delimitations, and (h) ethical considerations.  This chapter also included descriptions of my data collection methods and specific strategies that I used to maintain the credibility of my findings. Once all data was collected, analyzed, and reviewed, a conclusion was synthesized, and the final report was shared with the Dean and the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs. In Chapter 4, I present my data and a discussion of my findings. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes my research with highlights from the data and

suggestions that the Grant University College of Business, and other colleges and schools of

business, may find useful for future development.

# Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this case study was to describe, analyze, and draw conclusions about internships in undergraduate business education at an AACSB accredited business school at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States. More specifically, this research identified the role, challenges, benefits, and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education from the perspectives of administrators, employers, and students.

This chapter starts with a summary of findings from a review of internship-related documents; face-to-face interviews with administrators and employers; and a focus group with students. The purpose of the internship documents was to provide insight into events and activities that cannot be observed (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013). In addition, a review of documents helped to support evidence obtained from individual interviews and also provided supplemental information that increased the richness of the study. Results of the document review, face-to-face interviews, and focus group are presented by research question and organized around the themes that emerged during the data analysis process. These multiple sources of evidence helped to triangulate the data to increase the reliability of the study. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary of findings.

## Research Question 1: Perceptions of the role and structure of internships

The first research question was designed to explore administrator and employer perceptions of the role and structure of internships in undergraduate business education. Specifically, it examined how administrators and employers perceive the current role and

structure of internships within the College of Business at Grant University and for business students in general.

According to the internship course syllabi and student internship policy manual, students are required to work at least six weeks and 120 hours during their internship experience. Risk Management and Insurance majors are required to work a minimum of 250 hours. Students can receive up to three credit hours for an approved internship; however, exceptions apply that will allow a student to receive additional credit hours up to six. For example, the staff training manual states that a student can receive six credit hours using either the General Business Internship Course (GEB 4941) or a combination of GEB 4941 for three credit hours and one of the other major-specific internship courses offered by the college's internships & career services office. Also, students interning abroad are eligible to receive six credit hours for one internship experience. Academic internship credit cannot be provided retroactively, and intern employers must be pre-approved prior to course enrollment. Currently, the professional sales major is the only major within the College of Business that requires an internship to graduate.

To define internships and clarify what qualifies as a legitimate experience, the College references the definition outlined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). NACE (2017a) defines internships as follows:

> *An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths, and; give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent. (para. 6).*

The employer internship policy and procedures manual states that internships must coincide with the student's academic semester and clerical duties must be kept to a minimum. While internships can be paid or unpaid, the College strongly encourages paid internships, when possible. The college's employer internship manual states the following:

> *Since students must pay the tuition for an internship for credit, it is often more difficult to fill unpaid internship openings. In these cases, many employers offer a stipend to cover the cost of the internship credit. Providing a paid internship may also increase the number of applications you receive for the position, and it would certainly be an incentive for those students who have to maintain a part-time job throughout college to help cover expenses. Sales majors are encouraged only to accept paid internship opportunities. Ultimately, the employer determines whether an internship is paid or unpaid. However, the College of Business has the right to reject a student's request for academic credit for an internship experience if the experience does not meet established guidelines. (p. 4)*

Administrators and employers were asked questions related to how they describe the internship program within the College, specifically for their academic area/industry, and how they perceive internships in business as a whole. Eight administrators, including two deans, and 6 employers agreed to provide insight into the topic. The analysis of the administrator and employer perceptions of the role and structure of internships in undergraduate business education yielded the following themes:

1. Internships Expand the Boundaries of Business Knowledge
2. Internships Should Be Customized

**Internships Expand the Boundaries of Business Knowledge**

The Grant University College of Business website recognizes their mission to "be a leader among public business schools, expanding the boundaries of business knowledge and providing exceptional educational experiences for our students." To fulfill this mission, the college's 2017-2022 strategic plan notes that internships have become an important approach used to involve students in relevant industry experiences designed to prepare them for career success. This plan also emphasizes the college's hope to become a leader in both academic and professional growth by increasing the number of internships performed, the percentage of students who participate, and the number of industry-related activities. During my interviews with administrators and employers, they shared valuable insights into their perceptions of how internships can expand business knowledge through skill development and experience.

**Administrator Perceptions.** By encouraging employer internship development and student internship participation, the Grant University College of Business uses collaborative techniques to provide academic internship course credit and promote professional development through unique learning opportunities (Internships and Career Services Staff Training Manual, 2018). While the program specifically targets business majors, services are also rendered to non-business majors seeking academic credit for business-related internships. Overall, internships are considered a complementary approach to business education; however, administrators have a shared vision of enhancing the academic and professional skills of each student while making them more marketable as they leave academia and enter today's competitive workforce (Internships and Career Services Staff Training Manual, 2018).

Currently, the College of Business only requires internship participation for students majoring in professional sales; however, all students are encouraged to participate in order to

gain valuable work experience. When asked about the role of internships in business education, the majority of administrators saw internships taking on a more prevalent role in business education than in years past. Mary, an accounting professor, shared:

> *Internships have become much more critical and significant than they were back when I was a student. I feel like in the last ten years, our students feel that if they don't have an internship, they're not going to end up with a full-time job.*

Donald, Dean of the College, said "we have so many students who have very little professional development experience. Therefore, the role of the internship, to me, is crucial moving forward."

Although internships are not required for all students in the College of Business, they are strongly encouraged. Each department has an internship course that can be taken as elective credit within the major or as general elective credit toward graduation hours. All administrators interviewed agreed that the implementation of these courses and the creation of a designated internship office are prime examples of the important role that the College has placed on internship participation as a supplement to the traditional business courses being offered in business schools worldwide.

Whether or not internships should be required in business education has been a topic of discussion in many business school environments. Size of the college and location of the institution are just two areas that play a significant role in a college's decision to require college-wide internship participation. While administrators unanimously agreed that internships are a great way for students to gain professional experience, not all agreed that internships should be required. Jason, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs, shared the following:

*Alumni are of the opinion that internships are something that benefits absolutely*

*everybody who goes through it. I'm not sure that I agree with that. I think it benefits a*

*large number of people, but I also think that there are many students who are mediocre*

*students translated into mediocre interns. I don't know that that's a benefit for everybody.*

In contrast, Thomas, a professor in the marketing department, felt that internships should be a requirement of every degree program within the College. He said:

*I feel it's the counterbalance, or the matching piece, to academic learning because you've*

*got to put everything you do in perspective. A lot of what gets taught in a college of*

*business is related to theory, based on sound, factual information. I feel it should be a*

*requirement of every degree. Most of the departments, even if they do not make it a*

*requirement, strongly advise that everyone do an internship.*

According to Ingrid, a management information systems professor, "internships have to be an integral part of an education." Frank, an associate professor of Finance, elaborated by sharing the following:

*The role of internships gets critical because you learn how—there are many things to*

*learn outside the classroom that you learn at the workplace. This is the first experience*

*for a lot of our students who get on-the-job training. It's where they learn valuable things*

*and are exposed to the way a business works. It's critical in that regard, and it's critical*

*in other respects, like the first step in getting a job.*

Matthew, a management professor, said that "students are going to be much more prepared to be competitive in the marketplace if they have that supplemental experience that takes what they learn in the classroom and puts it into a more applied setting."

A report from the National Association of College and Employers (2017a) found that "employers anticipate hiring 3.4% more interns in 2017 than they did in 2016" (p. 1). Forty-one percent of employers polled indicated that they would increase intern hiring in 2017 while 42% would maintain (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2017a). Only 17% mentioned a decrease in intern hiring (NACE, 2017c). The fight for talent continues to increase, and administrators interviewed for this study agreed that internships are becoming more attractive to employers and are creating more competition for students. Abigail, a professor in risk management and insurance, shared:

> *There's a real competition for talent. If a company can get an intern, earn their love and respect, they've got an employee that they've already test-driven and can hire at a reduced cost and know what they're getting. I've had several interns who have just started their junior year and a year-and-a-half before they're ready to graduate, they have a job. That's awesome and amazing. It relieves a student of pressure. Usually, those jobs are with larger organizations, but with this war for talent, there are hundreds of thousands of jobs in my industry waiting to be filled because the boomers are leaving.*

Business knowledge includes personal know-how and the accumulation of various skills and experiences. Overall, administrators agreed that business knowledge is enhanced when students seriously engage in meaningful internship experiences that transcend the traditional business concepts learned in the classroom.

**Employer Perception.** All employers interviewed felt that internships are helpful in developing professional skills necessary for success in the workplace. Gavin, a financial advisor, recounted the story of a former intern who later pursued a different career path and now serves as a Chief Financial Officer for a large company. When asked if he regretted his decision to

complete the 3-month internship with Gavin's company and instead do something more relevant to his current field, the former intern said no. Gavin said, "Although he did not pursue full-time employment with our company, he made it clear that the skills he learned as an intern were directly transferable to what he's doing now in the business world."

Four of the six employers interviewed agreed that networking skills are essential in business and that internships are a great way to improve those skills. Two employers mentioned specifically how internships help build a student's work ethic. Jeffrey, a tax accountant, shared that students learn the importance of being punctual, honest in their communication, and flexible in their willingness to take on extra tasks. Amanda, a realtor and executive assistant, also mentioned the importance of workplace decorum and getting acclimated to the company culture while Paul, a corporate communications and outreach director, shared that the professional skills of their interns are often tested even before they are offered an internship within his organization. He said:

> Our first vetting process is that they follow instructions. If they don't, then they're out. It's just pretty basic. If we ask for a resume and cover letter, but you only provide us with a resume, then you don't get past level one.

Daniel, president of a market research firm, asserted that most businesses that offer internships are going to help students develop professional skills. "In class, the whole point is for you to learn and for me to show you that you learned," said Daniel. "In business, the point is that I want you to learn, but I want you also to help my company at the same time. It's not a show me thing; it's a mutually beneficial thing." Employers overwhelmingly agreed that internships not only immerse students in the day-to-day functions of an organization but also expand their

knowledge through the development of soft skills often learned outside of the classroom but considered necessary for employee success.

**Internships Should Be Customized**

To increase the value of internships, Hergert (2009) suggests that each experience is structured and combined with the academic knowledge that students learn in the classroom. Creation of a universal internship template that all schools and businesses should use may be impracticable; but a customized structure has the ability to reduce limitations and produce positive learning outcomes for student participants (Hergert, 2009; Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013; Saltikoff, 2017).

While all internship programs share similar components, administrators and employers interviewed for this study overwhelmingly agreed that internships should have structure and be customized to the institution, industry, and/or company involved. The following section shares administrator and employer perceptions of the value of structure and customization for internships in undergraduate business education.

**Administrator Perceptions.** All administrators interviewed expressed support and concern over the structure of internship programs in academia and industry. Four of the eight administrators interviewed elaborated on the need for structure in an industry while the remaining four shared extensive thoughts on the structure from within the college. For example, Thomas, a professor in the marketing department, said, "Internships are an investment for an employer. If companies are really going to commit, it has to be structured." Abigail, a professor in the risk management/insurance, real estate and legal studies department, shared that a lack of

structure has been a concern of hers for years as she works with employers. To combat that problem, she volunteers to help. She said:

> When there is a new internship or somebody setting up something new, I always volunteer to help them. I have launched and set up an internship with an organization here in the city that didn't have one before. They didn't know how to begin so I structured it for them. They took my plan and had an intern ever since. I have some companies that say, we have never had an intern before, what should we do? I'll say, Here's the map. Here are the resources and I can help you structure.

While participants unanimously agreed that structure is important, four administrators shared that it can also be difficult to facilitate in a college with more than 6000 students. Jason, the associate dean for the college, shared, "There are so many students who come through here, and for us to put any kind of structure on the internship process, we would have to dramatically increase the staff and their limitations of financial and personnel resources." Mary is an accounting professor who is heavily involved in internships for her department. She shared that structure is crucial especially for larger accounting firms. She also noted that internships are critical to their recruiting process and she doesn't see that changing any time soon. "I feel like there does need to be some structure in internships," said Mary, "but it can't really be the same for all firms." All eight administrators agreed that structure should be customized based on the organization and not a one-size-fits-all template. "We're all different," said Donald, dean of the college. "Every school has a different way of approaching industry, even across departments in our own college." He also shared, "it would depend on how you define experiential learning." I could see a situation where some of our departments, might have some experiences that were much more focused on research."

Jason, associate dean for undergraduate programs, added:

> *I never believe in templates where everybody should follow. You have to adapt it depending on the situation. The situation facing students in an urban area can be radically different from those facing students who are in a suburb and rural university. The situation facing students who are preparing for a particular career like accounting or financial services or professional sales were radically different than for a student who's going to take a generalized degree in marketing or management or even areas like finance.*

He also shared that across-the-board structure would be difficult especially in fields like human resources, but he noted that it would ultimately depend on the industry and the major.

> *In accounting, professional sales, financial services and perhaps in risk management and insurance and even real estate, that type of similarity in the structure may be possible. For example, financial services professionals in another state may do a mix of hardcore finance and advising, planning, and financial planning. There, those firms could be so alike one another that they could get together and they could create a standard across all the firms that each firm could modify. In other areas, I just don't think it's a possibility.*

Donald elaborated by adding that the structure of an internship program also depends on the mission, or set of values, that a company, organization, or individual has established.

He said:

> *If there was a template for internships, you'd have to customize. It's like anything else. All business schools participate in shared learning, and all business schools have certain*

*criteria they have to meet for their faculty qualifications. There's enough wiggle room in*

*there that you can make it your own, it all depends on your mission.*

All administrators agreed that structure is necessary, but customization should be specific

to the needs of the institution, its students, and employers.  Business schools have often been

criticized for focusing too much on theory and abstract concepts (Hergert, 2009; Hodge,

Proudford, & Holt, 2014); however, Hergert (2009), noted that structured internships could help

address these criticisms while providing substantive experiences to the students being served.

**Employer Perceptions.**  All employers interviewed for this study agreed that internships

play a significant role in helping students gain valuable work experience. However, five of the

six employers felt that the structure of the program should depend on the needs of the student

and the company. John, a manager for a logistics provider, shared that the basic components of

his organization's internship program are very structured. He also said, "this allows us to ensure

that students are quickly able to learn the basics of the business within the first four to five weeks

on the job."

When asked about intern orientations, all employers agreed that some type of orientation

is necessary to acclimate new interns to the company culture. However, the content of these

sessions should vary across industries. Gavin, a financial advisor, mentioned that their

orientation is ongoing throughout the semester and focuses heavily on what they call '*joint*

*work.'* Joint work is having a senior adviser show an intern the financial advising process first

hand. The remaining five employers noted that their orientation typically takes place during a

dedicated timeframe at the beginning of the internship providing students with an overview of

the company, expectations, and learning outcomes.

When asked about the role and structure of internships employers agreed with administrators that structure is important and should be customized to the institution, industry, and/or company involved. Gavin shared that their internship program varies by semester and that the length of a term can impact the structure of the experience. He said:

> *Unlike summer, it's a little bit more intense since students tend to take fewer credit hours. But generally, it's Monday through Thursday, 2 hours every morning; first hour tends to be focused on training, understanding different financial concepts. For instance, the difference between different types of life insurance, disability insurance, or the difference between tax treatments on different accounts. The training can be very specific.*

John shared similar thoughts and noted that the structure of his program is often based on the students that they recruit. "We prefer to hire students right out of school," he said. "That allows us to train them and get them up to speed as quickly as possible." He also noted that his internship program is used as a way to build relationships with the university in order to improve their success in hiring quality candidates. When asked specifically what at typical internship program at his organization looks like, he said:

> *The first four to five weeks of the internship are spent in operations. They really have to learn the business and the nuts and the bolts of the shared operation and then from there, they usually transition into either a carrier side or the customer side or sales.*

Daniel, president of a small market research firm, noted that duties are often ever changing for his interns because of the size of his company. Because he works for a small business, interns and employees are often asked to perform varying tasks. He shared:

*Sometimes we have a meeting and everyone has their responsibilities, and it goes on how*

*it's supposed to. Other times, everyone has their responsibilities then we get the email*

*from the client at 10:00 a.m. and now everyone's responsibility is whatever that issue*

*may be. Our interns fit into their role within the machine. Along those lines, they get*

*taught how to do what they need to do.*

A study conducted by Rothman (2007) in the early 2000s asked 402 undergraduate business students if they had any suggestions for employer improvement to existing internship programs. "Sixty-four percent of the students suggested improvements or changes and foremost among the suggestions was the need for more structure on the part of the host company with regard to the internship itself" (p. 141). The fact that all six employers interviewed for this study agreed that structure was important demonstrates how internships have evolved over the years and that student concerns have not gone unnoticed. Varying degrees of structure exist among each participant, yet all felt that the structure they maintain continues to provide a mutually beneficial experience.

**Research Question 2: Perceptions of the benefits and intended outcomes of internships**

In order to accomplish the college's mission of "expanding the boundaries of business knowledge and providing exceptional educational experiences for our students" (College Strategic Plan, 2017-2022, p. 1), the internships and career services office supports experiential learning in all forms by collaborating with departments to provide academic internship course credit and promoting professional development through unique learning opportunities" (Student Internship Program Policies and Procedures, 2017, p. 3)

The Grant University College of Business website and the employer internship recruiter guide lists the following as primary benefits of student participation in an internship experience:

- Combine knowledge gained in the classroom with practical skills used in the workforce.

- Obtain skills and knowledge that transfer across the industry to other employment settings.

- Reach clearly defined goals and objectives that relate your professional development.

- Supervision and feedback by a professional with expertise in the field of experience.

- Explore whether or not your chosen career path satisfies your particular needs, expectations and goals.

- Provide an opportunity to apply interpersonal/communication skills and learn more about yourself in a work setting.

- Possess a new sense of motivation and maturity relative to your academic studies upon returning to school.

- Develop a network of professional contacts that includes both company, staff and other interns.

These benefits provide opportunities for students to gain exposure to industries that they may not have otherwise known. Internship participation also provides valuable benefits to the employer that provide these opportunities. According to the college's employer internship recruiting guide and the employer internship manual, those benefits include, but are not limited to:

- Short-term support without a long-term commitment

- Management experience for supervisors/mentors who direct the intern's work activities

- Opportunity to evaluate potential job candidates (six to 12-week interview) before offering permanent employment

- The best source of new permanent employees

- Higher retention rates for employees with company internship experience

- Source of new ideas and fresh approach to problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, etc.

- Highly enthusiastic, capable and motivated students

- Company name recognition and increased visibility on-campus

The following themes emerged from the administrator, employer, and student responses to questions related to the benefits of internship participation in undergraduate business education:

1. Internships Bring Theory to Practice While Shaping Career Outlooks

2. Internships Lead to Full-time Job Opportunities

3. It's All About Building Relationships and Pipelines

**Internships Bring Theory to Practice While Shaping Career Outlooks**

Internships have long been referred to as a type of experiential learning that allows the learner to apply the theoretical aspects of classroom knowledge to the practical applications of a professional work environment (Kolb, 2015; NACE, 2017a; Rizk, 2011; University of Texas at Austin, 2016; University of Colorado Denver, 2015; Zopiatis, 2007). Internships facilitate a natural transition from college to work (Coco, 2000) and being able to translate that academic knowledge into a practical setting has been a primary benefit of internships since their inception (Divine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013). Employers often view internships as a long interview while students see it as a means for career exploration (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Rothman & Sisman, 2016; Velez & Giner, 2014).

Both views provide benefits without a major investment in time and resources (Coco, 2000; Divine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007). During my research, administrators, employers, and students shared valuable insight into how internships bring theory to practice while shaping career outlooks.  The following section provides more detail related to this theme.

**Administrator Perceptions.** Six of the administrators interviewed shared that having a thorough understanding of their major is an essential career development skill. Ingrid, a professor in management information systems, asserted that students need to know what they're getting themselves into as they pursue a major. "I can explain things theoretically and show students various technologies in the classroom," she said. "But they may only hear what I'm saying and won't truly understand it until they see it in practice." Thomas, a marketing professor, shared that internships are the next step in growing up. "You don't get that if you only set foot on campus and participate in social/academic activities," he said.

Seven of the eight administrators interviewed felt that all students should participate in an internship if only to test drive their degree before they get out in the real world. Abigail, a risk management and insurance professor, has been coordinating the risk management internship course since she began her position in the College and from her view, she sees students coming back to the classroom with a different outlook. She shared:

> *They come back with a passion that they didn't get from a textbook or from a lecture. They actually get to see the business environment. We've been teaching them the fundamentals, but now they get a chance to see that it makes sense and that it works. For me, that's the most rewarding.*

Abigail also noted that her students come back to class more polished than when they left. "They get more confidence in their interpersonal skills and their business acumen," she said. "They also

have savvy and are more marketable to other employers." Matthew, a professor in the

management department, has multiple roles within the college that allow him to interact with

various employers and students from all majors. When asked about the most beneficial outcomes

of internships, he shared, "just being able to go out and do the types of work that they hear about

or thought they wanted to do helps shape their career outlook." He said:

> *They may think they want to be an accountant or a financial analyst or an HR person and*
>
> *then they go through the internship and go, "Oh, I can't stand this. There's no way I can*
>
> *do that." Or they go, "No. Great decision. This is exactly what I thought it was going to*
>
> *be. I'm very excited." They come back actually even more and more energized. I think*
>
> *that experience is absolutely critical.*

Six administrators agreed with Matthew in believing that students sometimes leave an internship

knowing what they don't want to do as opposed to developing a greater appreciation for the field

they have chosen. Jason, associate dean for the college, noted that there's great value in this type

of feedback. Abigail added that when this happens, it is usually because the job wasn't diverse

enough, challenging enough, or the role did not fit their personality.

Jason shared:

> *The students who participate in internships, anecdotally, seem to have a more realistic*
>
> *view of what they have to do, the holes in their education, the holes in their personal*
>
> *development that they need to fill, and what they want to do, and where they want to go.*
>
> *There are students who don't participate in internships, not exclusively, but they're less*
>
> *focused, less prepared, and less sure about what they want to do.*

Whether the internship solidifies what the student loves or brings to light something the student hates, all administrators agreed that both are beneficial and will help shape the student's career outlook and academic pursuits moving forward.

Thomas, a marketing professor, shared a story of a student that took an internship for the sole purpose of making money. After returning to school, he was amazed at how much the student's attitude had changed. "He learned so much, became more responsible, and gained respect from senior executives," said Thomas. "The maturing aspect of that was just phenomenal." Seeing students return to the college after an internship with a renewed sense of purpose was a sentiment that all eight administrators shared.

**Employer Perceptions.** The 6 employers interviewed all agreed that internships provide a great opportunity for students to develop professional skills while deciding if the career path they have chosen will be their best option. Gavin has worked with many interns during his time as a financial advisor and shared that "some students don't feel prepared to go to the job market after they graduate. I think that an internship is a great way to get them prepared both for the interview and the resume." Jeffrey, a senior tax accountant, shared that employers should continue to connect the textbook knowledge learned in the classroom to what's happening in the real world. In addition to internships, he suggested that professors make every effort to integrate real-life perspectives into the classroom by putting students in situations that force them to talk in front of the class or give presentations. "I think that offers a value-add to the student," he said.

John, a manager in the supply chain industry, shared that continued exposure to real-life experiences is key to professional success. He said, "some students have a misconception that internships are just paper pushing or stapling or filing papers - a belief that the company is taking advantage of the student - when in reality, what we do here is based on actual business."

Amanda, a realtor and executive assistant, shared that the skills their interns learn will definitely shape their career outlook. She noted their intentionality in trying to recruit students with a genuine desire to work in real estate so when they come into the office, they bring what they've learned in the classroom and merge that with the expert knowledge they receive from seasoned associates. "My industry is dominated by older men," she shared. "Having younger people in the office makes them realize that these will soon be our clients and future leaders." She also shared that her interns bring a fresh perspective that forces them to rethink how they do business.

> *We realize that we can't continue to do things the way we've always done. "That's not the way of the future and people who own land, sell land, sell properties, and lease properties are changing demographically. Therefore, the way we reach people must change as well. I think it's a good thing to watch what they're doing, see what their habits are, and listen to their ideas.*

Amanda also noted that the skills these interns are bringing to the company, coupled with the knowledge they learn on the job, are definitely helping them shape their career outlook and her organizations potential for continued growth. Overall, employers unanimously agreed that the benefits of internship participation far outweigh the challenges.

**Student Perceptions.** When asked about the benefits that internships offer, all five students agreed that career preparation was a significant factor. Two students mentioned how the internship helped them decide what they wanted to do in their future career while two others noted that it helped them figure out what they didn't want to pursue. Anna mentioned that when she went into her financial advising internship, she had no idea what she was doing, but after this experience, she realized that this wasn't the area she saw herself pursing as a future career.

However, she acknowledged that she still gained valuable skills and experiences that she didn't learn in a classroom. For Christopher, a senior HR management major, he found that his internship was the perfect route into his chosen career field. He shared:

> *As an HR intern, I was exposed to HR management in the execution of what that's like. I also worked alongside HR managers, and it gave me the opportunity to say, Hey, do I love this or do I like this? I found that I loved it."*

Dylan, a marketing and sales major, had a similar experience in his sales internship. He shared that what he learned in terms of professionalism, hands-on skill development, and leadership, "far eclipses the money that they paid me that summer." He also shared that he viewed his coursework differently after taking part in an internship.

> *For me, one of the biggest things after I came back from my internship, was the way I viewed course content and the way it was being taught. It was night and day. It was, honestly, unreal. It's very similar to what you understand in a Master's program where you go out and get experience, come back and actually learn. While I understood a lot of things in my classes, specifically my sales classes before, you can't really get the full understanding until you do an internship and come back.*

He went on to say that he felt as if he added more value in classroom discussion because of the exposure he received during his internship.

> *I wasn't really speaking any more about things that I've learned, but about experiences- things that I absolutely went through, you have experience, and can actually make inferences about. I'd say that's the biggest one for me- actually being able to add value in your classes. That's real.*

Three of the students mentioned how the internship helped them experience adulthood. Isabella, a senior accounting major, shared:

> *Before I did my internship, I would stay up until 4:00 in the morning and pull all-nighters. I'd wake up at 2:00 in the afternoon and study all day. Once I started my internship, I had to wake up and be there at this time. I was waking up at 6:00. I was going to the gym because I was tired after work. I was making lunch like an adult, cooking my own food, not eating out every single day. I was like, "Oh my God, it's totally going to be gone by the time I start school next year." All of my friends were like, "Oh my God, you're such a mom." Now I wake up at 7:00 every day and it just kind of stuck with me. It was a nice habit to start forming during an internship.*

Jill, a risk management/insurance and sales major, shared how she appreciated having the opportunity to be in a professional atmosphere.

For Timothy and Isabella, having an internship away from home and school was especially rewarding. "One of the cool parts about internships, is being able to try out different locations without being completely committed 100%," said Isabella. She shared:

> *Having a paid internship that can support life in a different city for a couple weeks or months is pretty valuable to students who are trying to explore and reach out and step out of their comfort zones and not just go back home. I really liked that aspect of it.*

Dylan had a similar experience and shared how important it is for students to be able to explore the world.

He said:

> *A majority of kids I talked to were about to graduate, and each wants to go live*
>
> *somewhere. They're like, "I'm going to go to San Diego, San Francisco, Atlanta, New*
>
> *York." I asked them -"Okay, have you been to any of these places before" and the*
>
> *overwhelming response is "No." I think that it provides such an amazing experience to go*
>
> *see a new city. The demand has never been more important to have that experience*
>
> *before you graduate because the reality is these kids are going to go there.*

All five students agreed that participating in an internship improved their professional skills, increased their confidence, helped them determine what they like and don't like about their chosen career field, expanded their network, and made them more marketable for future opportunities.

**Internships Lead to Full-time Job Opportunities**

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017b), the conversion rate from intern to full-time hire was 51.3% in 2017 while the one-year retention rate was 65.5% for interns that received full-time offers from the companies for which they interned. The possibility of full-time employment has remained one of the top benefits of internship participation (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008) and the participants in this research emphasized this during their interview sessions. The following section will provide perceptions of the benefits as seen through the eyes of administrators, employers, and students.

**Administrator Perceptions** All administrators interviewed felt that internships help students secure full-time employment. Three administrators specifically mentioned full-time employment as the number one benefit they see from internship participation. Frank, a finance professor, said: "it's the biggest thing." He named several companies that have hired students

from his department and also noted the maturing aspect that comes from participating in an internship prior to graduation. He said, "It's the next step in growing up."

Mary, an accounting professor, noted that the majority of her students receive full-time job offers prior to graduation. "Our larger companies need interns, but they eventually need the full-time positions filled," she said. "I think internships are so valuable because when students start their full-time jobs, they're already ahead of the game, especially in these large firms." According to Matthew, a management professor, many employers use internships as an extended interview process. "At the end of this experience, an employer might find good talent and offer that person a job," he said. "Therefore, I see an internship evolving into part of the overall selection process that many organizations are using." Donald, dean of the college, shared, "if you want our students to have great job placements, they need to do one or more internships along the way." Abigail, a risk management and insurance professor, shared that her department has a 100% placement rate so securing full-time employment after an internship has not been an issue. She mentioned that the student's concern comes after the offer has been extended. Abigail shared:

> *Many of our interns do get job offers, and then they're wondering, should I sign on so*
> *soon if I still have another year left before graduation. I just say, don't feel pressured.*
> *They'll wait for you. They're trying to save themselves on recruiting costs and all that*
> *kind of stuff."*

She also suggested that the university share more best practices. "The university environment doesn't share. It's siloed. Things that break down the silo would be valuable."

The possibility of securing full-time employment was an overwhelming benefit that all administrators shared. As more companies provide opportunities and more students participate,

the majority of administrators interviewed for this study see internships playing an even greater role in the interview process for full-time hires.

**Employer Perceptions.** The six employers interviewed for this study all agreed that internships help the students grow professionally while taking on the role as a training ground for future employment either within their organization or another company. Paul, a corporate communications and outreach director, mentioned that his company prefers to bring on students in their late junior or early senior year so they can learn for about a year and then switch them over to full-time employees. He shared:

*We do not bring on interns just for a single semester project. We don't have any fluff*

*projects for interns to work on. They're working on real work. We try to provide that*

*real-life experience for them, and it's been very beneficial for them. What's good for us,*

*too, is we can figure out early on if they're a good fit culturally, and groom them, and*

*mentor them as they transition from being a student to a full-time employee.*

Gavin, a financial advisor, shared that his company is highly focused on developing their internship program. He mentioned that interns not only develop skills necessary for success in today's workforce, but they also provide great benefit for the organization through "significant productivity and by generating higher levels of revenue than what we call a career changer, someone who is in their mid -30s or 40s that comes on board. A big part of that is because interns start so young." Gavin also shared that the retention rate of new financial advisors that participate in their internship program is much higher than those who don't. He said:

*The retention rate of a new financial adviser that doesn't come through the internship*

*program is 15% or less. Eighty-five percent of people are failing out in the first five*

*years, but those who come through the internship program and then go full time, the*

*success rate is something like 50%. So we know from our data that some of the most*

*successful people in the program tend to be more successful long-term on the full-time*

*side.*

Jeffrey, a tax accountant, mentioned that his organization is able to be more efficient as a result of their internship program. "We are better able to identify young candidates for entry-level positions which helps us to grow as a company," he said.

Paul, a corporate communications and outreach director in the Software/IT industry, has been successful in recruiting interns and full-time employees with his '*Job Hop.*' Paul created the *'Job Hop'* back in 2016 as a one-day tour for students to visit top business in the area who are looking to hire interns and employees from the local universities. He also implemented a similar program called *'Professor Hops'* to give them an opportunity to see the companies and opportunities that exist in the local community in hopes that they will encourage their students to consider. "We've hired four or five people because of '*Job Hops'* and 2 or 3 people because of *Professor Hops*," said Paul. He also mentioned that their intern program is more like an "intern-to-hire" type program.  He shared:

> *We bring on interns, not for just a semester or even two semesters. We time it typically*
>
> *their early senior or late junior year to where they can stay on with us for about a year.*
>
> *Then switch them over to full-time. We try to provide that real-life experience for them,*
>
> *and it's been very beneficial for them.*

He also said:

> W*hat's good for us, too, is we can figure out early on if they're a good fit culturally, and*
>
> *groom them, and mentor them as they transition from being a student to full-time. If you*

*walk around the office, you'll see a lot of our staff are in their 20s. That's our primary*

*recruiting thing. Now, if we need mid-level people, obviously we can't do that, but we try*

*to have a nice pipeline of interns so that they can be full-time later.*

Finding interns with the skills necessary to successfully fill a full-time role was a

recurring theme among employers interviewed for this study. Although some employers work in

small businesses and don't have an immediate need or the capacity to house additional

employees, they all agreed that the internship was an excellent training ground to prepare

students for full-time employment no matter the organization they pursue.

**Student Perceptions.** Four of the five students participating in the focus group were

offered full-time jobs. Christopher, a senior HR management major, mentioned a plethora of

benefits but noted the most significant as being the job offer. "This internship gave me the

opportunity to confirm that I love this field," he shared. "Once I learned the culture, I was better

able to execute and made better decisions." Isabella, a senior accounting major, was offered a

full-time position with an accounting firm and shared how important participation in an

internship was in her decision to accept. She also shared some experiences that friends without

internship experience encountered in their search for employment.

She said:

*I have friends that have already graduated. One out of five is happy with their job. None*

*of them got careers in their field. They had no internship experience and didn't really do*

*much even to see what else was out there. They just took the first option.*

Dylan, a senior marketing and sales major, believes that so many students experience the type of

situation that Isabella described because their parents are not here to force them into finding

these answers before they graduate. He shared:

*There are no parents up here to baby you into it. You're on your own, and therefore that's why I feel that the college of business should recognize the situation and step in with a responsible parent role of forcing these kids into learning these hard realities about themselves. It will save them hundreds of thousand dollars down the road in terms of wasted opportunity, wasted years treading water or financial hardships in going a direction that had they learned earlier, wasn't for them, they'd be way ahead in their career and financially stable.*

Jill, a senior risk management/insurance and sales major, was offered a full-time position with her internship employer; however, she declined the offer in order to explore other interests. She still works remotely for the same company in a paid internship position and finds that the experience has been rewarding as she continues her studies. "My supervisor is awesome," she said. "I can talk to him about anything." She also mentioned that he helps her navigate through other employment options which shows her that he actually cares and invests time in teaching and guiding her professionally.   Kelly shared a similar experience. She wasn't offered a full-time job but was given professional guidance that she considers invaluable in her ability to make sound career decisions moving forward.

The five students participating in this study all shared positive benefits of participating in an internship; however, obtaining full-time employment was mentioned most frequently. Only four of the five students was offered a full-time role; however, each shared that his or her internship provided the skills necessary to successfully transition into any professional positions they might receive immediately following graduation and beyond.

**It's All About Building Relationships and Pipelines**

Attracting top companies has always been a goal of business schools (Gerken, Rienties, Giesbergs, & Konings, 2012). These relationships often open doors for internships and other employment opportunities (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Velez & Giner, 2014) while also supporting the development of increased reputations for both the institution and employer (Coco, 2000; Divine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007; Weible & McClure, 2011). By building relationships, schools are also able to improve fund-raising efforts (Coco, 2000, Divine et al., 2007; Weible & McClure, 2011). Therefore, the benefits of internships are shared among students, employers, and business schools alike. The following section summarizes the perceptions of administrators, employers, and students on the value of building relationships and pipelines through internship participation.

**Administrator Perceptions.** The 8 administrators interviewed all asserted that students, schools, and employers receive benefits from internship development. Aside from the most common benefit of students receiving experience and careers, seven administrators mentioned alumni relationships and industry partnerships as important factors in the success of the college's internship program. Five administrators stressed that the college is not where it wants to be with its internship program, but they are making strides to achieve their internship goals with help from alumni and board members. Donald, dean of the college, shared that alumni help you get your foot in the door. "If you're trying to get in with a big company, we always look for the alumni connection first because that's the easiest way to get connected," he said. Donald also mentioned that getting connecting to the right person also opens the possibility of receiving a personal gift from that alumni to the college. "Either way, both help the college." Jason, associate dean for the college, noted that pressure from alumni and board members to increase

the number of internship opportunities and the mechanisms by which the college can encourage students to participate is only going to increase. "The Dean certainly embraces this," he shared, "and wants to increase the number of internship opportunities both from the demand side of us creating opportunities for students and from the supply side of creating internship opportunities for the companies."

Matthew, a management professor, shared that while students are gaining a better understanding of how departments within a business work, they are also gaining a level of emotional intelligence during their interactions with business professionals. "Business is all about people," he said. "If students don't understand how to interact, communicate, and express ideas with people, they are going to be deficient." Mary, an accounting professor, shared that the alumni in her department are typically the ones that come back to recruit and attend student-focused events. "They keep in close contact with us," she said. "Many times, alumni are the first people who reach out to us to establish an internship," said Abigail, a risk management/insurance professor. Ingrid, an MIS professor, noted that "alumni are the ones who pull in the next generation, so they are extremely important."

Thomas, a sales professor in the marketing department, shared that his department is completely self-funded. Therefore, alumni are important in two ways: one for the internship, but two, for the sponsorship. He loves it when new companies hire their students and are wowed by their performance. "Many employers expect to train new interns," he shared, "but many of the companies we work with obtain interns that are much more prepared and more productive." He noted that investing in their department means a lot to an employer's bottom line. "Invest in us and your ROI will be significant," he said.

Matthew, a professor in the management department, agreed that alumni are extremely important, but he feels that the College needs to do more to engage them. He shared:

*I'd like to create an alumni council or council of alumni under 30 that are relatively recent graduates that are working in the field. They would not only give feedback on the curriculum and insight into what's happening within the industry from their perspective versus my central Board of advisors which are executives. The viewpoint between the executives and those that are in front-line jobs is going to be vastly different. Both perspectives are valuable but what I think the alumni base will do is they'll also offer an opportunity to connect with these organizations that we may not have right now which could mean more internships for our students.*

All 8 administrators believe that building relationships is an essential benefit of internship programs. Those connections provide essential experience for the students and a network of supporters that help the institution grow and develop. "Our alumni are the most loyal to us," said Frank, a professor in the finance department. "They'll go out of their way to help our students. If it's a student from another institution, it might be a little bit different, but you get loyalty from your alums." Corporate and alumni relations staff, along with foundation officers, work daily to help the college cultivate these relationships in order to maintain a steady pipeline of experiential, academic, and financial supporters.

**Employer Perceptions.** When asked about the primary resources employers use to recruit interns, relationships and job postings were the resources most frequently mentioned by all six employers. Four employers shared that they leverage relationships with current and former faculty to gain entry into targeted classroom settings. Daniel, president of a market research

firm, shared that he has been able to build relationships with student organizations through his connection with the university career center. He said:

> *The student version of the American Marketing Association has reached out on occasion because they want a speaker. In fact, I met one of my better interns at one of those events. Just getting in front of students so they're aware of us is huge.*

Amanda, a realtor and executive assistant, and Jeffrey, a tax accountant, shared that job postings have been a sufficient recruiting tool for their intern hiring needs. However, having contacts within the College of Business has also been helpful in getting the word out to students about their internship opportunities. Paul, a corporate communications and outreach director shared that it has been easy for him to recruit students from the college because they put in the work ahead of time to develop lots of relationships with the university. "I know whom to contact if we have an internship position," he said. "There are at least 8 different contacts that I've had to cultivate in order to get the word out effectively. If you're an average business that has not taken the time to develop relationships, recruiting could be quite difficult."

Daniel, president of a market research firm, mentioned that his primary resource in reaching students in the college was his senior partner, a former marketing professor at the school. "There were a thousand students a year in his classes so he had a number of quality candidates and they liked him," he said. He also noted that the connection between the professor and students helped to peak the student's interest in the business allowing them to receive many qualified applicants for open internship opportunities. Now, they primarily recruit using job postings and email blasts sent out through the College.

John, a manager in the supply chain industry, has participated in several events on campus and agreed that building relationships is key to developing a robust internship program that benefits both students and employers. He shared:

> *Right now, it's all about building relationships and pipelines. What the university is doing by hosting networking events has been very helpful. We just had students in our office for a meet and greet and a shadow session. There were 10 students here, and from those 10, we found our two spring interns. I knew them ahead of time before I interviewed them, I already knew that I had conversations with them at this event.*

He also said:

> *The thinking behind that is if I can get those two, if I can host an event for an hour and from those 10 folks I get two interns for the spring, and then those two interns turn into full-time positions, then it's worth it. They're getting real-life experience, and they're getting business acumen, and they're getting that in the internship. In return, I'm getting the opportunity to sell them our company for four or five months in hopes of when they graduate, Here's the job. You don't have to go find a job. I have a career for you already lined up.*

Gavin, a financial advisor, shared that building relationships also provides the student with valuable references. He said:

> *I am more than willing to write a letter of recommendation or do whatever else necessary to help students succeed. It's not always about an internship becoming a long-term career, but about the skills you learned and the relationships that you build.*

All of the employers interviewed mentioned the value in developing effective communication skills during an internship experience. Jeffrey often stresses to his interns the importance of enhancing their ability to put themselves in uncomfortable positions to talk to people they don't know. For his industry, communication skills are essential, and he encourages his interns to get involved in the community and network as much as possible.

Overwhelming, all employers agreed that making the appropriate connections within the college is essential in their ability to effectively recruit new talent and create an internship program that they can sustain long term. They also unanimously agreed that it is equally as important for students to build their network and expand their networking skills. In sum, building relationships and pipelines was a recurring theme that employers felt strongly impacted their organization's productivity and the intern's professional growth and development.

**Student Perceptions.** Four of the five students participating in this research agreed that internships were important in their ability to develop meaningful professional connections. Isabella, a senior accounting major, shared that the associates, seniors, and managing directors at her accounting firm were all very open to getting to know her and answering her questions. She said:

> *Getting on a personal level with these people was probably my biggest takeaway and benefit. I sat down with them. I had dinner. I asked them about their personal lives. This really helped me get a full perspective of what I could possibly be getting myself into in the next couple of years.*

She also shared that each intern was assigned a senior advisor and a mentor that was close in age to each intern. "It's nice knowing that we have that structure and can also connect with other

mentors that we admire," she said.  Christopher, an HR major, shared that he had more access to senior leaders as an intern than some of the full-time staff.  He said:

> *As an intern, you have that ability to just walk into a senior director's office and literally interview them about the projects that they're working on. They understand because you're that intern. You're trying to grab that knowledge, but an everyday worker or associate within the firm can't just walk into the Senior Director's office without going through their manager to ask for functions like that. That's another benefit.*

He also shared:

> *I have multiple people at various different levels that I can go to anytime to talk with. I had to meet with my mentor weekly, my manager bi-weekly, my senior director bi-weekly, and also my executive like once every three weeks.  They were really engaged in my interests and where I want to be, what I want to be, and what I want to experience.*

Anna, a senior finance major, mentioned that her supervisor was very instrumental in giving her the opportunity to research things relevant to the job in order to aid her in making more informed decisions about her anticipated career path. "She would have me research what kind of classes you need to take, what kind of programs there are, and how long they last," she said. "That definitely was helpful because I would not have known any of that if I didn't' have that opportunity to conduct further research." Jill, a senior risk management/insurance and sale major had a great relationship with her supervisor and shared that she still keeps in contact. She said:

> *We talk all the time. I'm so honest with him. I tell him about upcoming career fairs and potential job offers. If they actually care about you, then they are going to be invested in teaching you, tell you what to do and guide you.*

Dylan, a senior marketing and professional sales major, said that his supervisor and co-workers provided him with a wonderful internship experience. "The time that they took to ensure I developed both personally and professionally was wonderful," he shared. "I couldn't be more fortunate."

Each student shared positive feedback about the relationships they built within their organizations and how those relationships have extended beyond the internship itself. Based on the feedback provided, good supervisors provided quality instruction, coupled with personal and professional mentoring, that helped each student easily transition into the next phase of their career development. Overall, building relationships and pipelines was a recurring theme that resonated with positive results throughout the focus group discussion.

**Research Question 3**: **Perceptions of the challenges of internships**

The eight administrators and interviewed for this study agreed that financial and human resources are primary challenges in their ability to administer a holistic internship program. These challenges, according to three administrators, are driven by an increasing student population that has not included an increased budget. According to the university website, the College of Business is the 2nd largest college on campus with more than 6000 students. Describing some of the challenges that his department faces, Frank said:

> *Finance is the third largest major on the campus. We have 1400 juniors and seniors, so to require an internship and to track it is quite an administrative task. If we had a hundred students like some other majors, it would be much easier. We encourage all of our students to do internships and a few other things, but that doesn't mean they do them. We haven't required it up to this point, but it would be superior. However, can we deal*

*with those costs? I don't know, that's why we haven't done it. We need companies too,*

*obviously. This city is not Manhattan or Los Angeles or something. So there are*

*challenges along those lines as well.*

Matthew shared that students also face financial difficulty when selecting an internship experience. He mentioned that students might sometimes accept sub-standard internships because they are paid while more advanced opportunities in other locations are turned down because their either unpaid or fail to provide housing or relocation assistance. According to the student internship policy manual, students receiving academic credit for an internship are also required to pay the tuition and fees associated with course enrollment. Therefore, accepting an unpaid internship can be even more of a challenge for students that may struggle financially. Two administrators also shared their concern over recruiting practices and the timelines that some employers follow when recruiting interns from the College.

Employers, on the other hand, overwhelming found making the right university connections and recruiting the right students to be the most difficult challenges they face in internship development. The majority of employers interviewed for this study have dual roles within their organizations. They not only supervise interns, but some are also involved in the recruitment process as well. Therefore, many rely on events coordinated by the college and relationships they build to assist them in recruiting qualified students.  This can sometimes be challenging due to multiple job responsibilities and perceived difficulty in connecting with appropriate university representatives. Additionally, three employers shared that making connections within the university environment can sometimes be a challenge which discourages some employers from connecting with potential interns.

While exploring how administrators, employers, and students perceive the challenges of internships in undergraduate business education, the following themes emerged:

1. Financial Constraints Impact Growth

2. Access to Internships, Data, and Students Should Be Simplified

**Financial Constraints Impact Growth**

The Grant University College of Business continues to experience growth that facilitates the need for more financial and human resources to sustain. The cost associated with internships has been identified as a limitation that many students and institutions face (Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013). With an undergraduate population of more than 6000, the college's leadership realizes that making internship participation a requirement would necessitate more staff and a larger network of employers – both of which involve costs that small schools and those in rural areas may find difficult to maintain (Divine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007; Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013).

Students can also face financial challenges with internships that may require relocation. On the other hand, employers can be challenged in their ability to invest in the development of a quality internship program. According to Heffernan (2017), the most beneficial internships can sometimes come at a higher cost because they provide "practical and substantive experiences" along with financial compensation (p. 1786). In return, employers receive access to potential hires that have already completed a comprehensive training program with hands-on experience (Heffernan, 2017).

Situated learning demonstrates the important role that community has in our ability to make connections and create new knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Unfortunately, financial

constraints can hinder our participation in this "social-cultural process" (Zhang, Kaufman,

Scheell, Salgado, Seah, & Jeremic, 2017, p. 3). Therefore, the following section outlines

administrator, employer, and student perceptions of how financial constraints impact student

internship participation and the employer/administrator ability to expand internship programs in

both industry and education.

**Administrator Perceptions.** Five of the 8 administrators interviewed highlighted the

need for more financial and human resources to support the college's internship program.

Donald, dean of the college, noted that it takes staff to manage an effective internship program

and money plays a significant factor in the college's ability to hire more staff. He shared,

"there's not a single problem in this college I can't fix with money." Jason, associate dean for

undergraduate programs, mentioned that an increase in staff is necessary to accommodate any

structured internship program with over 6000 students. "We would have to dramatically increase

the staff and their limitations of financial and personnel resources to do this," he said.

Frank, a professor in the finance department, agreed with Donald and Jason when he

noted that the lack of money and staff preclude the college from having an ideal internship

program. "We can't do all the things we want because of the resource constraints," he said.

According to Ingrid, an MIS professor, her department would have an internship program

specific to her area with its own internship coordinator if money was not an issue. "The more a

person is tuned into the content of a major, the better," she said.

Matthew, a management professor, sees the issue of financial resources as something that

sometimes falls on the student more so than the college. He shared that internship opportunities

that may be out of the state or country can be difficult for some students to pursue if the

company does not offer a housing allowance, stipend, or other travel accommodation. According

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to Matthew, "it may be a wonderful opportunity for them, but they just don't have the resources to be able to support that experience" He also said:

> *When I was working with my previous corporation, we would bring financial analysts interns in every summer. It would be upwards of 20 to 25 people from all of our targeted campuses. But we had the luxury of having corporate housing. We would just put them in the corporate housing which we were already paying for anyway. We had that luxury. Many organizations don't have that. That becomes a cost barrier that limits where students can potentially go for internships. In fact, from my role in the Center, one of the things that I'm trying to do is raise money to offer internship grants or whatever in order to support students going in that direction.*

All eight administrators agreed that financial constraints impact the growth of the internship program in colleges, the development of internship programs in business and industry, and the level of student participation. With this knowledge, the majority of administrators shared that the financial and academic support obtained from relationships with alumni and donors has been invaluable in the college's efforts to increase awareness, participation, and quality. However, more is always needed and appreciated.

**Employer Perceptions.** All six employers, agreed that more staff would be helpful in their ability to recruit and retain quality interns. Each employer performs multiple roles within their organization so recruiting interns is sometimes secondary which can often be attributed to the cost associated with hiring additional staff and maintaining a substantive internship program.

Unlike other employers interviewed, recruiting has become an essential duty for Gavin and Paul. Gavin, a financial advisor, took on the role of college unit director back in 2015. "This

position runs internship for this region," he shared. "It's about coaching and really helping these young folks see what it's like to run a business." Paul, a corporate communications and outreach director, shared that his current role also includes recruiting new hires. "I manage a couple of the marketing employees in the marketing department and also do marketing strategy," he said. "I'm starting to do some analysis type of work also, but I'm the primary outreach to the universities for recruiting students." For John, a supply chain manager, his company is larger and has a dedicated recruiter based in their company headquarters. This person conducts the initial interviews and then notifies Paul of those that are eligible to come into his office for a second interview. The second interview also includes a shadowing opportunity of 15 to 20 minutes. Jessica, Jeffrey, and Daniel all work for much smaller organizations. Therefore, the recruiting process is not as structured as the three mentioned previously. However, all six employers have supervised interns and noted that they take this responsibility seriously in hopes of creating a rewarding experience for the interns they train.

Financial constraints may be difficult for some employers to overcome. To minimize that concern, four of the six employers interviewed suggested that more outreach come from the college to help employers navigate the recruiting process. Paul mentioned that he has discussed hosting events with the career center where the university invites businesses to campus and shows them how to recruit interns. "Invite companies that represent various industries," he said, "and showcase how you go through the process of recruiting. Give them contact points and job listing sites. Really hold their hand through the process."

All six employers offered paid internship opportunities and strongly suggested that all employers do the same, when possible. "If you're getting output from an individual, you need to pay them," said Jeffrey. Amanda agreed and shared that if the company is benefiting, pay should

be required. Paul, on the other hand, supports paid internships but shared a different perspective on the value of unpaid experiences. Before assuming his current position, Paul owned his own business where he recruited unpaid interns. "I didn't have the cash flow to be able to afford paid interns," he shared, "but I really tried to make up for that by offering them an incredible teaching experience." He also shared:

*Every person that came through that program is doing quite well in their current jobs. They are able to get jobs very quickly because I gave them real-world experience. What I've seen with certain agencies and companies is almost like taking advantage of the fact that they have unpaid people. They're doing legitimate work where it should be a paid position. To me, it seems unfair to the student.*

Daniel, president of a market research company, provides his interns with a stipend at the end of the term. When he informs students that they will receive a stipend instead of an hourly wage, he admits that they lose some applicants. "For a lot of them, it's less about the opportunity and more about if I am going to be paid while I'm working," he shared. "I've been a college student, so I understand."

Overall, all employers agreed that financial constraints could have a negative effect on their ability to grow their internship programs and provide students with competitive wages. To achieve long-term success, they encouraged more involvement and connectivity from the school to aid in their recruiting efforts. Despite the pitfalls that come as a result of financial challenges, each employer recognized the value in internship participation and continued to use the resources they have to provide meaningful learning experiences to the interns they serve.

**Student Perceptions.** Each of the students participating in this study had a paid internship; however, when asked if he or she would accept an unpaid experience, all agreed that they would decline. Isabella, an accounting major, mentioned that her internship was out-of-state and the compensation was a great help in her ability to support herself during the weeks that she was away. Dylan, a sales and marketing major, also participated in an out-of-state experience and shared that if it had not been paid, he would not have been financially able to support himself.

Two students questioned whether employers truly value the intern if the experience is unpaid. Christopher, a human resource management major, said:

*When I see unpaid internships, they're mainly for non-profit organizations, and I can understand that. But when you have a for-profit organization and you have an unpaid internship, I feel that you don't value that position. So it's not worth my time to give my time to your organization.*

Although Dylan's paid internship was essential, he was able to express his thoughts on how an unpaid experience could yield benefits. "My internship outweighed any money that I received," he said. "When I take a step back and look at everything that I learned in terms of professionalism, hands-on skill development, and leadership, the value that I learned far eclipses the money that they paid me that summer. Jill, a risk management/insurance and sales major, added that being paid for the work she performed was extremely helpful. She also noted that she is still receiving the benefit of compensation as she works remotely for her internship employer.

When reflecting on the size of the college and the services provided, Dylan said, "It blows my mind. How could there be such a small department dedicated to internships with so

many kids who need this stuff?" He acknowledged that financial constraints might be to blame, but also shared that, "when I close my eyes, I can't think of anything I've done better here in this college than my internship. We must make the correct infrastructure investments to achieve our goals." Maria agreed and added that new buildings on campus are beautiful, but we also need to pay our teachers. Dylan added:

> *The university really needs to dedicate a lot more money, time, and employees to this internship program. Again, I do not think anything makes more of a difference in a student's life than the internship and everything that comes along with that and the ripple effect that comes after that.*

In sum, each student preferred paid internships because they help cover essential costs (i.e., relocation/living expenses, tuition, etc.) and demonstrate that the employer truly values the work that they perform. In addition, the majority of students agreed that internship programs should receive more financial support in order to enhance the student's professional development and increase the number of internship opportunities. Overall, they acknowledged that financial constraints might be a challenge, but that challenge should not diminish the value that internships provide.

## Access to Internships, Students, and Data Should Be Simplified

Students seek internships, employers seek students, institutions seek data, and the cycle continues. While the need for each is essential, the process to obtain can sometimes be daunting. For example, all students interviewed for this study were critical of the traditional career fair model for finding internships and full-time jobs. Employers felt challenged in their ability to make meaningful recruiting connections within the university environment. And administrators

were concerned with, both, capturing college-wide internship data and understanding some employer recruitment strategies. Bandow (2015) found that business and academia must work together to see improvements in the overall nature of internship programs.

Situated learning theory suggests that new knowledge is gained after we make connections within our community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Therefore, the learning process shifts from an "individual focus to a participatory focus" (Quay, 2003, p. 107). The following section outlines administrator, employer, and student perceptions of the challenges associated with finding internships, recruiting interns, and capturing data. By viewing these groups as learners within the same community, new knowledge has a platform to emerge in order to provide recommendations with the potential to simplify access to internships, students, and data.

**Administrator Perceptions.** Three of the 8 administrators interviewed saw tracking internship participation as a major challenge facing the college. Matthew, a professor in the management department, shared that, "It's hard for us to have consistency in what the structure of an internship should look like if we don't have good mechanisms in place for tracking." His suggestion to combat this problem was to make internship participation a requirement. He said:

> *Making it required as part of any type of undergraduate curriculum will force a little bit more structure. It will force development of objectives, development of certain core exposure that aligns with certain content areas and it's going to provide a little bit more formality in how students experience that process and ultimately improve the quality of the type of experiences students have.*

He also argued that tracking internship participation is about more than numbers. "It's also looking at the qualitative elements." Ingrid, a management information systems professor, shard

a similar sentiment by describing a new survey that she has given to her undergraduate students. "I would like to get a bit more feedback on my student's internship experience," she said. "So I'm asking them, not only if they have done an internship, but also would they recommend that internship to others." Matthew also added that tracking internship participation while gaining qualitative data can help to ensure that students and employers are matched correctly and that our curriculum is relevant. He said:

> *It starts to give us insight on whether or not we are teaching students the right things. For me, the focus should be on the development of skills, not just knowledge. Skill comes from the development of knowledge, and that's important, that educational component of critical thinking, but if you can apply it then what's the point. Then again that's the value of the experiential piece – you're coupling the academic, the theoretical, and the conceptual elements that they get in a class with how it's actually applied in the field.*

Jason, associate dean, reflected on the struggles of capturing internship data in a college with over 6000 undergraduate students. He said:

> *The challenge is capturing students who are engaged in internships and other experiential learning activities that function as an internship and capturing that information so that we can have a comprehensive view of just how many students are engaged to the sector.*

He noted that the college can easily track internships for those that register for one of our internship courses but tracking college-wide remains difficult. "We have to audit," he said. "It could be an equal number, it could be a large number, or it could be a smaller number of students who are going out and getting internships on their own." He also shared, that "capturing

information from them and making sure that it is compatible or equivalent to the information we're capturing about the people internally and doing that in a timely fashion is a difficult job.

Four of the eight administrators interviewed expressed concern over recruiting strategies. Frank, finance professor, and Thomas, a marketing professor, felt that students should get involved in internships as early as possible. "I would say the end of their sophomore year, going into their junior year, if possible," said Frank. Thomas added that the college should do more outreach to first-year students in order to prepare them early with the knowledge they need to secure an internship. "Send them emails and talk to them about the need to do an internship," said Thomas. "We're talking about a change."

For two administrators, early recruiting was a major challenge for their departments. Mary, an accounting professor, fears that larger firms will start to recruit earlier than usual causing students to commit to a company without having the opportunity to explore other options. According to Mary, her students typically participate in an internship after their senior year, before their fifth year. She shared:

> *If it were to move earlier, it could have a negative impact on the student in the sense that they may not have the ability to explore other options…It's tough because I can see the appeal from the firm's perspective. They want to get the students locked into their firm early, but from the student's perspective, I don't know if it's in their best interest. It's one of the things that we try to balance.*

Her department once used best practices, or recruiting guidelines, to manage the process.

She said:

> *The best practices are the recruiting guidelines where they'll even talk amongst themselves and say that we need to all play nicely in the sandbox. It's frustrating whenever I hear from one recruiter that another firm offered this student an internship and they shouldn't have.*

While it has been difficult at times, Mary admits that it's getting better because everyone is communicating more effectively. She said:

> *Everybody's aware of it and sensitive to the fact that students need to have the opportunity to explore their options. If everyone is following the same timeline, it really works in the best interest of the students and the firm.*

Abigail, a risk management/insurance professor, teaches in the only department within the College that once managed their own internship course outside of the internship & career services office. "I don't know how it evolved that we were the only department doing that," she said. "My thought is that it's because we have more time involved." Her program currently requires a 250-hour commitment per semester while other programs in the college require 120 hours. She also noted that a lot of the work that her students perform requires a license. She shared:

> *If the student doesn't have those licenses, our coursework sets them up to get those licenses. Sometimes, they can get them by taking online courses in their first week or two with the internship and get a license to be able to do real production work.*

Like Mary, Abigail also finds it challenging when recruiters begin the recruiting process too early. She shared:

> *What I'm finding is that companies are trying to get in the door and secure internships very early. Traditionally, we do it at the end of February or March, and I've got companies that make their summer internships decisions by the October before. How do we serve that market? That's a challenge for us by trying to give those employers what they want but how early can they keep getting ahead because they're competing against one another. That's a challenge.*

Both Mary and Abigail acknowledge that it is great that their interns are securing full-time jobs before they graduate. However, the war over talent can sometimes be challenging in the recruiting process as a whole.

**Employer Perceptions.** Four of the six employers interviewed feel that recruiting students is challenging for some companies because of their inability to connect with the appropriate persons within the college. Paul, a corporate communication and outreach director, shared that an average business that has not spent the time developing relationships on campus would find recruiting interns to be quite difficult. He said, "a lot of people have told me they don't know where to begin in the recruiting process. I can imagine it's quite daunting." He experienced this challenge early in his career but shared that things are much easier now since he's been through it and has developed connections. Daniel, president of a market research firm, agreed with Paul and asserted that more outreach needs to occur from the institution. "If it's a business that's never had an intern, they may need someone to hold their hand so they understand how it works," he said. Jeffrey, a senior account, has been involved with the university for many years so he has not personally found it difficult to connect.

However, he shared:

> *The clients that I tell about our internship program and how great it has been for our*
> *company typically don't know where to start. If I'm a business owner and I do not have*
> *any connections to anyone in the college, I wouldn't necessarily know where to go either.*
> *If there isn't something pushed out to say, "Hey, this is where you can come to get an*
> *intern, and these are the benefits," I don't know if many employers will put the first foot*
> *forward. I don't know how that can necessarily be accomplished, but I know that would*
> *be a need.*

Gavin, a financial advisor, prefers getting in front of classes to recruit interns but shared that this approach has also been difficult to accomplish at the college. He shared:

> *Trying to get just into classes and gain more exposure on campus has just been very*
> *challenging. When I reach out and say, "I'm a college unit director. We have the number*
> *one finance internship in the country, it's a paid internship. It's a great opportunity." My*
> *thought would be as a professor who's spending time with these kids, supposedly helping*
> *them figure out what's the next step in their life, they would be more engaged in having*
> *those conversations, getting people like us in front of the students to say, "Hey. I was*
> *there. I was 21 when I started my business, right? I'm doing okay. I'm doing pretty well."*
> *But they don't tend to be very open to that.*

John, a supply chain manager, noted that his primary challenge has been accessing specific majors. He acknowledged that he had difficulty finding the right talent when his search was open to all majors, but when the college added a sales team and a focus on supply chain, his recruiting efforts improved. "In the past, we hired whomever we could as long as they fit the

mold," said John. "Now, we get students in sales and supply chain, so we're able to pick and choose and potentially get a person who may already be interested in our company and know who we are, versus five years ago." According to John, expanding the majors within the college, improved his recruiting efforts.

All six employers advertise their internships by posting positions to the university job board or by making contact with a connection at the university. Other methods of recruiting depend on the types of relationships the company representatives have with the college and/or the overall internship needs of the organization. Regardless of the methods used, five of the six employers agreed that the college could do more to educate employers on internship programs and assist them in gaining access to the students in order to recruit more effectively.

**Student Perceptions.** Four of the students interviewed expressed concern over the difficulty of finding an internship. Christopher, a senior human resource management major, shared that he applied for over 500 internships, got 10-12 interviews, and only two offers. "It's really stressful," he said, "because you want to find an internship for what you are studying. Receiving rejection emails and having people not communicating with you was difficult." Isabella, a senior accounting major, mentioned that students in her department typically have a clear career path. She switched her major to accounting and immediately started applying for internships. "I wish that I would have opened my eyes to more than just the big four accounting firms," she said.

For Dylan, a sales and marketing major, the career fair specific to his major was most beneficial in his internship search. "It provided the right resources for every student to get an internship who wants one," he shared. He also mentioned that he was not impressed with the university-wide career fair. "I think that in the beginning, the idea was really great, but in my

opinion, they haven't adjusted for the massive amount of over-population the school has experienced." Jill, a risk management/insurance and sales major, shared that her department also hosts a separate career fair and she agreed that this major-specific event was most helpful. "I think some majors are ahead of the game on this," she said. Although individualized career fairs within the major are not unique to all departments within the college, each student interviewed felt that it would be helpful if they were a part of the overall recruiting process. "I think we should do this," said Isabella. "There are lines of people at the university-wide career fair, and surface level conversations are taking place. Then they just put your resume in a pile." Christopher shared:

> *I'm not sure if you really get a real pool of talent in that type of environment. That's why I've found the internship that I have, and the job that I have through an individual and not the career fair. I was the one having a conversation with an individual and allowing them time to get to know me. That's how I got the job I have.*

For most of the students interviewed for this study, traditional recruitment methods have become ineffective. With over 6000 undergraduate students in the College of Business alone, and over 40,000 campus-wide, the idea of a university-wide career fair, for example, has become an overwhelming concept that has forced many students to focus on personal connections, individual research, or major-specific events/activities. Despite their concern, they all believe that what the college offers is invaluable, but may require simplification and personalization in order to increase participation from both students and employers while improving internship placement rates.

**Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide detailed information on the administrator, employer, and student characteristics and findings related to the study's research questions. Eight administrators and six employers were selected to participate in face-to-face interviews while five students were selected to participate in a focus group. A total of seven different themes emerged based on the study's three research questions (See Figure 2). The first research question was about administrator and employer perceptions of the role and structure of internships in undergraduate business education. The two themes that emerged from the findings were: (a) internships expand the boundaries of business knowledge and (b) internships should be customized. The majority of administrators and employers believe that gaining work experience through internship participation is a critical component of business education. While classroom knowledge is of extreme value, they all felt that internships serve as an important complement to the traditional business school curriculum. Administrators and employers also felt that internship programs should be customized and structured; however, this customization should depend on the institution and/or company. Administrators and employers unanimously agreed that all internship programs share some common features, but how each program is designed and administered should be based on the organization's mission, vision, and culture.

The second research question was about administrator, employer, and student perceptions of the benefits and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education. The themes that emerged from this section included: (a) internships bring theory to practice while shaping career outlooks, (b) internships lead to full-time job opportunities, and (c) it's all about building relationships and pipelines. The majority of respondents felt that internships were an excellent way to put classroom knowledge to practice in real-world business settings. They also

believed that many students are able to, either, solidify their career path or change their career direction into a more appropriate field as a result of an internship experience. Research shows that 51.3% of internships lead to full-time employment (NACE, 2017b) and each research participant shared the high conversion rate as one of the most significant benefits of internship participation. Administrators, employers, and students also emphasized the benefits of expanding their professional network through internship programs. Students receive mentors that last beyond the experience; administrators receive connections that support the institution financially and professionally; employers receive access to talent with the potential to stay long term. These benefits were highlighted throughout the narrative and provide specific take-a-ways that each research participant used to justify internship participation.

The third research question explored administrator, employer, and student perceptions of the challenges of internships in undergraduate business education. The two themes that emerged from this section included: (a) financial constraints impact growth and (b) access to internships, data, and students should be simplified. Finances were highlighted as the most pressing concern for administrators, employers, and students in regard to internship program growth and participation. Administrators mentioned the need for more financial resources to hire staff able to support a student population of more than 6000 students. Additional staff would manage the administrative components of academic internships, create professional development activities, and provide more employer outreach to increase internship opportunities for the students being served. Students also mentioned the difficulty they experience in accepting unpaid internships. Many students shoulder the burden to pay tuition for academic internship courses, relocation fees for experiences outside of the city, and costs associated with everyday living expenses.

In addition, the majority of administrators highlighted capturing data as an additional challenge that the college faces. Currently, internships are not required collegewide; therefore, capturing data from students that are not enrolled in an internship course for academic credit poses a challenge. Finally, administrators, employers, and students were concerned with recruitment strategies, and many felt that those strategies should be specific to the major, college, and/or industry.  These concerns were highlighted most frequently throughout the discussions and provided great insight into future recommendations that will be shared in chapter 5.

## Research Questions & Themes

| Research Question #1 | Administrator and employer perceptions of the role and structure of internships in undergraduate business education |
|---|---|

•Internships Expand the Boundaries of Business Knowledge
•Internships Should be Customized

| Research Question #2 | Administrator, employer, and student perceptions on the benefits and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education |
|---|---|

•Internships Bring Theory to Practice While Shaping Career Outlooks
•Internships Lead to Full-Time Job Opportunities
•It's all About Building Relationships and Pipelines

| Research Question #3 | Administrator, employer, and student perceptions of the challenges of internships in undergraduate business |
|---|---|

•Financial Constraints Impact Growth
•Access to Internships, Data, and Students Should be Simplified

**Figure 2.** Research Questions & Themes

# Chapter Five: Discussions and Conclusions

The purpose of this case study was to describe, analyze, and draw conclusions about internships in undergraduate business education at an AACSB accredited business school at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States. This research identified the role, challenges, benefits, and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education. The three research questions used to guide this study were:

1. According to administrators and employers, what is the role and structure of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University?

2. According to administrators, employers, and students, what are the benefits and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University?

3. Based on the perspectives of administrators, employers, and students what are the challenges of internships in undergraduate business education at Grant University?

This chapter provides a discussion of study findings, limitations, and conclusions. Findings are organized by research question and followed by overall study conclusions. A discussion of study limitations and conclusions follows the discussion of study findings. Lastly, implications and recommendations for future research are provided. This chapter ends with closing thoughts about the study.

## Discussion of Findings

At the onset of this research, I adopted a constructivist orientation to learning. Constructivist believe that meaning is not discovered but created by an individual's view of the

world around them (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). This approach helped in my ability to understand the 4 theories that were used to guide my research. By identifying contextual teaching and learning, situated learning, work-based learning, and cognitive apprenticeships as my conceptual frameworks, I was able to recognize why the process of learning is vital in our ability to affect the outcome of learning. The individual interviews and focus group played an essential role in my understanding of how students create knowledge and how administrators and employers can use that information to enhance the curricula while developing internship programs that meet the needs of a changing labor market.

Inserting my voice into the narrative was a challenge, but it was important for me to remind myself of the research paradigm that I selected and give myself permission to participate in the research. I found great value in seeking out multiple perspectives. Not only was I able to gain a greater appreciation for the program and a broader understanding of its intent, but I was also able to challenge my own thoughts and move that single interpretation of my reality to encompass a broader view of internships in undergraduate business education. I admit that it was difficult at times to remain open to new ideas; but as themes and ideas emerged, so did my understanding of how this knowledge can work together to create new ideas that will further advance the field. Overall, my personal beliefs align well with the seven themes that emerged from this study. The following section provides further detail and discussion on how these findings connect to the theoretical frameworks that were used to guide this research.

**Perceptions of the role and structure of internships.** The first research question explored administrator and employer perceptions of the role and structure of internships in undergraduate business education. The two themes that emerged from administrator and employer questions related to their perceptions of the role and structure were: (a) internships

expand the boundaries of business knowledge and (b) internships should be customized. Administrator and employer perceptions were consistent throughout the narrative. The most identifiable role of an internship, as perceived by administrators and employers, was the student's ability to gain business knowledge beyond a traditional classroom setting. Situated learning posits that learning begins within our own communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through social interactions, we make connections that aid in our ability to create new knowledge and expand our involvement in the activity we have pursued (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Therefore, as we gain new connections through internship participation, we gain new knowledge with the ability to expands the boundaries of business knowledge.

Almost all administrators and employers shared thoughts on the value of internship participation and the need to ensure that internship programs have a structure that is customized based on the institution and employer. Administrators and employers felt that a robust internship program must be structured.

A review of the literature showed that internships have become a common feature in undergraduate business education programs (Hergert, 2009; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008) with 92% of business schools offering internship experiences (Coco, 2000). As students explore potential career paths, they are also able to "create realistic expectations about the world of work" (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008, p. 61). These expectations aid in their ability to increase their business knowledge. Literature also shows a "consensus among all the definitions proposed that internships are meant to be educational and should provide structured, meaningful, and career-relevant experiences" (Stirling, Kerr, MacPherson, Banwell, Bandealy, and Battaglia, 2017, p. 28). By providing a structured environment, institutions and employers are better able to customize programs unique to their organizational needs.

**Perceptions of the benefits and intended outcomes of internships.** The second research question explored the benefits and intended outcomes of internships in business education. The common themes that emerged from administrator, employer, and student perceptions of the benefits and intended outcomes of internships were: (a) internships bring theory to practice while shaping career outlooks, (b) internships lead to full-time job opportunities, and (c) it's all about building relationships and pipelines.

Thoughts on the benefits and intended outcomes of internships were consistent throughout each interview. According to Coco (2000), internships help students make a smooth transition from academia to the world of work. As theory becomes more relevant through practice, internships become more beneficial to administrators, students, and employers (Divine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013).

The National Association of Colleges & Employers (2017b) found that 51.3% of internships lead to full-time employment and this benefit was solidified by the students that participated in this study. Of the five students interviewed, four were offered full-time jobs while the other was given an opportunity to continue her internship in the next semester. While each employer interviewed did not have a consistent need to hire full-time employees, they did acknowledge that internship programs also assists them in helping interns secure full-time employment in other areas or provides them the satisfaction in knowing that they played an important role in helping the student develop important skills necessary for future career success. Overall, all administrators, employers, and students agreed that internships are an excellent way to help students develop professional skills while also preparing them for future job opportunities.

Conceptual teaching and learning contains eight components with the first being making meaningful connections. Students and employers agreed that internships provide an excellent opportunity for them to develop professional connections. The majority of students and employers interviewed for this research remain in contact after the internship experience and all students mentioned how their former supervisor has become a valuable professional connection. Administrators also shared that employers not only provide additional internship opportunities for other students but they also provide expertise for professional development programs and financial support for other college-wide initiatives. By making these connections, administrators and employers were able to design structured experiences that allowed the students to engage in significant work while collaborating with others and engaging in critical thinking, all of which are components of conceptual teaching and learning.

A review of the literature showed that internships provide benefits for students, employers, and institutions (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013; Kuh, 2008; Stirling, Kerr, MacPherson, Banwell, Bandealy, and Battaglia, 2017). Internships help students prepare for future careers while exploring various career options (Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010; Sattler, 2011); learn more about an organizations culture while providing motivations to remain in a chosen career field (Divine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007; Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton, 2013); put knowledge learned in the class to practice using hands-on experience (Kuh, 2008; Sattler, 2011); helps students build a strong resume (Coco, 2000; Divine, Linrud, Miller, & Wilson, 2007); and assist students, employers, and schools in developing quality professional connections with each other (Gerken, Rienties, Giesbers, & Konings, 2012) . Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton (2013) also found that internships help students develop essential skills like judgment, integrity, trust, and collaboration. By adding more hands-on experience, clearer expectations, and

input from both students and employers during the internship development stage, Knouse and Fontenot (2008) found that internship experiences for students, employers, and administrators can be significantly improved.

**Perceptions of the challenges of internships.** The third research question explored the challenges of internships in undergraduate business education. The themes that emerged from interviews with administrators, employers, and students were: (a) financial constraints impact growth and (b) access to internships, data, and students should be simplified. Interviewees overwhelmingly agreed that financial and human resources were challenges that plague administrators, employers, and students in different ways. For administrators, having the financial resources to hire additional staff to support a robust internship program was a primary concern. Many shared that additional funding would allow the college to have an ideal internship program. Currently, the small staff and growing student population of more than 6000 students makes it difficult to entertain the possibility of requiring an internship for all students. According to Divine, Linrud, Miller, and Wilson (2007), required internship programs would necessitate a large network of employers to sustain this level of structure, Kosnik, Tingle, & Blanton (2013) found that a dedicated staff to coordinate placements and manage assignments could be costly for smaller schools located in rural locations.

For employers, having more support from the university for recruiting and internship program development were challenges that they highlighted during the conversations. Many employers hold multiple roles within their organization so recruiting and supervising interns can become a secondary task. In addition, many employers interviewed shared that increasing employer participation in internship programs would be easier if the university performed more

outreach to assist employers in setting up a quality internship program, maintaining that program, and developing alternative recruiting strategies that would appeal to more students.

For students, unpaid internships were problematic. Each of the employers interviewed provided paid internship experiences. However, students shared that financial difficulty can be a challenge for internships that are out of state or out of the country. The students unanimously agreed that they would not be able to accept an unpaid internship outside of their city unless the opportunity was paid and/or provided some relocation assistance. Many shared, that if they don't have family in a certain area, it can be difficult to take on that financial burden for a few months out of the year if the employer does not provide financial assistance.

In addition, the majority of administrators shared the difficulty of tracking internship participation in a college that does not require internships. Finally, employers and students expressed concern over intern recruiting. Students felt that traditional recruiting methods, such as career fairs, were not as effective with the size of the student population. Employers felt that it was sometimes difficult to make the appropriate connections within the college to develop necessary recruiting relationships.

In work-based learning, the majority of the learning is received in the workplace while the institution of higher education assesses the learning outcomes (Lester & Costley, 2010). According to Rodriguez, Fox, and McCambly (2016), this type of learning is a prime example of how education and industry can work together to help students succeed in their chosen career path. By incorporating more work-based learning approaches to internship participation, the relationships between industry and academic could be strengthened therefore minimizing some of the challenges associated with funding and access to internship opportunities and students.

A review of the literature showed that funding, administration, quality and quantity of internship experiences, and legal issues are among the top challenges that internship programs face (Moorman, 2004; Sattler, 2011; Stirling, Kerr, MacPherson, Banwell, Bandealy, & Battaglia, 2017). According to Kosnik, Tingle, and Blanton (2013), additional challenges include (a) an extensive time commitment, (b) logistics and location, (c) placement, (d) limited integration with the business curriculum, (e) unstructured learning experiences, (f) incomplete learning cycles, and (i) less conducive to teamwork. Overall, administrators, employers, and students highlighted financial constraints and access to internships, data, and students as major challenges facing internships in undergraduate business education; however, those concerns did not outweigh the benefits that internships bring to all three.

**Discussion of Study Limitations**

Acknowledging the limitations of this study is an essential part of this research process. The primary limitation is that this study examines internships in undergraduate business education at an AACSB accredited business school located at a Research 1 institution in the southeastern United States. Of the more than 13,000 business schools across the country, only 789 are AACSB accredited. Therefore, conclusions and recommendations drawn from this study may have relevance for other colleges and schools of business; however, the thoughts outlined in the research only reflect the understanding gained from a single case study of an undergraduate institution. Because this was a single, qualitative case study, no other institutions were examined, no graduate student involvement was included, and no comparative analysis of similar programs was conducted.

In terms of gender and ethnic composition of the research participants, this study was also limited. Of the 19 participants, six were female, 13 were male, and 15 were white. The

institution under study is considered a predominately white institution (PWI) with a student

population that is 69% white. According to McDonald (2011), predominantly white institutions

are "higher education institutions that have a historically and predominately white racial

composition" (p. 16). Therefore, the thoughts gathered from this study are relevant for all

populations, but is limited in female and ethnically diverse voices.

This study was also limited in the sense that the researcher was a participant observer

who has been involved in the development and execution of internship programs within the

institution being studied. Acknowledging this relationship between researcher and subject was

necessary, as it certainly impacted the findings and conclusions that were drawn.

Finally, this study was also limited in scope. The conclusions, recommendation, and

implications were based on a limited number of administrators, employers, and students

affiliated with the Grant University College of Business. However, the recruitment process

developed for this study required that each participant be familiar with the internship program

and have knowledge about its purpose and processes. Given their knowledge, those participants

were better able to identify the role, structure, benefits, intended outcomes, and challenges of

internships in undergraduate business education at the Grant University College of Business.

**Conclusions**

The guiding question for this qualitative single case study was how administrators,

employers, and students perceive internships in undergraduate business education. Research

participants provided insight into their perceptions of the role and structure, benefits and

intended outcomes, and the challenges of internships in undergraduate business education.

Findings from this study can aid the college's leadership team in developing strategies to

improve existing internship initiatives. Each research participant category - administrators, employers, and students - plays a significant role in this improvement and development process.

In general, administrators, employers, and students all held positive views on the importance of internships in undergraduate business education. An analysis of responses emphasized their belief that internships have a positive impact on a student's professional development and their ability to secure full-time employment. These perceptions aligned with the benefits shared on the college's website and in the college's documents. While feedback was overwhelmingly positive in regard to the role, benefits, and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education, research participants did express some concerns. Specifically, administrators felt that the success of an internship program is greatly impacted by funding and staff resources. With a college of more than 6000 students, there will be a need for more financial investments to support an increase in staff that can effectively administer a successful internship program. Administrators also shared concern over their inability to track internship participation when internships are not required.

Employers stressed the value that interns bring to their company and their ability to serve as mentors in the student's professional development. Even though all employers did not hire interns with the intent to make them full-time employees after a successful internship experience, all did share that they enjoyed the opportunity to positively influence the student's career development and maintain professional connections beyond the internship experience. For many of the employers interviewed, recruiting was a secondary job duty. Therefore, some felt challenged in their efforts to make appropriate connections with university personnel for recruitment purposes. Some employers found it difficult to work with faculty members in order to schedule classroom visits.

Students overwhelmingly felt that internships were an integral part of their undergraduate experience and expressed concern that all students within the college had not taken advantage of an internship experience. Four of the 5 students interviewed stressed how much more they valued their classroom experience after they were able to apply the knowledge in an internship situation.

Students also shared that as the college grows, alternative methods of recruiting should be explored. Many students felt that the traditional career fair approach was no longer effective and that more targeted recruiting activities that are specific to the student's major should be implemented. Students also shared that the professional connections they received while participating in an internship are invaluable even beyond the internship experience. Finally, while compensation was not the determining factor in their acceptance of their internship, it did play an important role in their final decision. Each student interviewed shared that they participated in a paid internship experience but shared that it would have been difficult for them to experience an internship away from home if they did not receive compensation and/or relocation expenses.

Findings from this study, not only suggested the need for funding and staffing, but also more conversations with academic departments, employers, and students about the unique needs of each area. These conversations may help bring more awareness and gain a better understanding of what works and what doesn't work in order to merge the positive features into one cohesive internship program that meets the needs of all stakeholders involved. Individuals invited to participate in this study were receptive to the invitation and freely shared valuable information - that may otherwise have not been revealed - about their perception of internships in undergraduate business education.

Some administrators were more involved in internships than others. Therefore, they demonstrated more awareness of the existing internship program and offered more depth in their responses. For example, two administrators also shared insight into the financial struggles that students face when they accept unpaid internships. They shared that many students settle for less engaging internships because they pay, while the more involved opportunities are overlooked because the student isn't financially able to cover relocation costs, everyday living expenses, and the tuition associated with internship course enrollment. Colleges and employers should take these issues into consideration when developing new internship initiatives.

The majority of research participants felt that internship should be required for all students in the College. However, they each acknowledged the difficulty in making that a reality. In addition to funding and staffing, a significant amount of employer relationships would need to be created in order to provide opportunities for 6000 students. Two participants felt that requiring participation may not be appropriate for all students when considering their level of motivation. Instead, integrating experiential learning exercises and activities into the curriculum could be an effective way to give students experience while developing essential skills (Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005; Kosnik, Tingle, and Blanton, 2013). Kosnick, Tingle, and Blanton (2013) found that experiential learning projects can promote collaboration while providing a structured learning experience.

Finally, administrators, employers, and students involved in this research shared multiple ideas to improve internships in undergraduate business education (See Table 14).

**Implications for Practice**

This study can inform practice for colleges and schools of business that offer internship programs to its students. Particularly, the Grant University College of Business and other

undergraduate business programs that support internship participation are encouraged to use the results of this study in conjunction with their existing plans to identify ways to improve programs and implement change. Other colleges and schools of business with similar programs can gain insight into how administrators, employers, and students perceive internships in undergraduate business education and how each stakeholder views ways in which change can occur. In addition, AACSB can use the results of this study to further their recommendation to increase experiential learning in business education, while other accrediting agencies can examine the role that administrators, employers, and students play in implementing strategies to enhance experiential learning in the undergraduate business school environment.

Given the fact that each participant provided suggestions to improve internships in undergraduate business education, the college's leadership team can gain new insight. More specifically, financial constraints were cited by the majority of research participants as the most challenging aspect of internship programs in business education. By seeking more financial resources from the university, alumni, employers, and donors, the college would be in a better position to hire more staff, provide more employer outreach for internship development, and support student internship participation through scholarships and other funding programs. More staff could also support employer outreach efforts by increasing the number of internship opportunities, the quality of internship programs, and the level of support that employers provide to students and institutions. Additionally, more staff could play a significant role with in-reach efforts by increasing professional development initiatives and encouraging students to participate in internships earlier in their academic career. Understanding each research participant's combined perspective on internships in undergraduate business education can lead to program

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**Table 14.** Suggestions for Internship Program Improvements

| Administrator |
|---|
| • Increase funding. |
| • Increase staff size. |
| • Increase professional development opportunities for students. |
| • Incorporate an internship liaison model for each academic department. |
| • Support faculty participation in comparable internship experiences. |
| • Encourage employers to host more faculty internship opportunities. |
| • Create an alumni council with members under age 30. |
| • Increase employer outreach to include trainings on how to start and maintaining a quality internship program. |
| • Incorporate more experiential learning projects into the classroom (e.g., employer-led case studies/projects. |
| • Encourage employers to offer paid internship experiences and provide relocation assistance for internships outside of the city or country. |
|   |

| Employer |
|---|
| • Increase university efforts to recruit employers. |
| • Assist employers in understanding the internship process from the academic side. |
| • Provide more opportunities for employers to speak in classrooms and participate in other on-campus recruiting activities. |
| • Connect more with the local business community to share local opportunities with the student body. |
| • Make the recruitment process easier by assisting new employers in developing and maintaining a quality internship program (e.g. workshops, site visits, etc.). |
|   |

| Students |
|---|
| • Provide more professional development opportunities earlier in their academic career. |
| • Promote internship participation earlier in the student's academic career. |
| • Rethink traditional recruiting strategies (e.g. department specific career fairs instead of university-wide career fairs, online career events, major specific receptions, etc.) |
| • Encourage more students to participate in student organizations. |
| • Require students to participate in internships. |
| • Require participation in professional development activities (e.g. require students to wear business professional attire on a designated day each week. |
| • Enforce a stricter admissions policy to minimize the number of apathetic students admitted to the college (e.g. require an essay). |
| • Increase marketing efforts for professional development events/activities. |
| • Provide more extra credit for professional development activities that are not required. |
| • Require students to take the business communication course earlier in their academic career (e.g. must be taken prior to senior year). |
| • Implement a Freshman 101 course for students not formally admitted to the college. |
| • Encourage students to develop academic and career plans during their freshman/sophomore year. |
| • Encourage students to start thinking about and doing internships as early as sophomore year. |
| • Encourage companies to create, and students to participate in, leadership development programs. |
| • Assign students to an academic advisor that will assist them throughout their academic journey. |

improvements and the development of new initiatives that meet the experiential learning directives outlined by the AACSB.

From this research, administrators can also gain a better appreciation for sharing knowledge across academic departments. One administrator mentioned that many departments on campus are in silos. She shared that being more knowledgeable about what others are doing in regard to internship development and administration, would expand opportunities and eliminate the need to always "re-create the wheel." Administrators are also able to gain more insight into what employers need from the institution to sustain a quality internship program and what students need in order to be better prepared for those experiences. Employers will understand how internships work from an academic standpoint and learn what components are most valued by administrators and students. Finally, students are able to have a voice in how internships are perceived and the roles that they see administrators and employers sharing in their professional development.

Gaining administrator, employer, and student support for this study was a major accomplishment. It is my hope that this study will provide valuable feedback for the future of internships in undergraduate business education and provide creative solutions to the challenges that each stakeholder identified in the narrative. Students overwhelmingly recommended more professional development earlier in their college career and new strategies to recruit students for internships and full-time opportunities. Perhaps, this study will shed light on the importance of exploring new strategies and listening to younger voices as we make decisions that ultimately affect their professional future.

Several administrators mentioned that they were not aware of some of the policies and procedures used by the college's internships & career services office or how the office works

with the university-wide career services center. It is my hope that this study will encourage administrators to become more familiar with the process, inspire their colleagues to do the same, and in turn, increase student awareness of the importance of internship participation while encouraging students to take advantage of the many resources that the office has to provide.

**Implications for Policy**

This study can also inform policy for colleges and schools of business that offer internship opportunities to its students. Administrators are urged to recognize the limitations that exist with a small staff and large student population and to support program expansion through additional funding, staffing, and the use of innovative technologies.  Student success should be the ultimate goal of any internship program. Therefore, policies should be directed at connecting students to experiential learning activities that extend beyond the traditional internship. This becomes even more relevant for a college with a disproportionate ratio of staff to students. Those experiences can include service learning, case studies, study abroad, undergraduate research, and hands-on experiences facilitated inside the classroom.

Policies that support student, school, employer, and community partnerships should be clearly outlined to ensure transparency in expectations. Guidelines and requirements are often made available for the students participating in an internship experience.; however, these resources can be just as important for employers, schools, and community partners. They should be easily understandable and flexible enough to accommodate diversity among industries and institutions. During this research, many employers mentioned a desire to have more support from the college in understanding school expectations and receiving suggestions on how they can improve recruitment strategies while maintaining a robust internship program. A comprehensive

set of policies and procedures would be one approach toward enhancing existing relationships while creating new partnerships.

By investing in innovative technologies, the college could improve their ability to track internship participation, measure the quality of internship experiences, and sustain relationships with key business contacts. Innovative technology could also be used to accommodate the internship and scholarship application process to ensure consistency in administration and accuracy in data collection.

Although increased funding is helpful, it is not the key to long-term success. Long-term success involves clear expectations, competent individuals, creative thinking, and a drive to produce positive results consistently.

**Recommendation for Future Research**

As a result of this study, several suggestions for future research have emerged. First, a focus on more diverse student populations would introduce new perspectives that could add depth to the research. The addition of more diverse voices could broaden the scope of the study and provide insight that could add relevance to internship programs at other institutional types. For example, a multiple case study of a predominantly white institution (PWI), historically black college or university (HBCU), women's college, men's college, or community college could provide a comparative analysis and possibly reveal major differences in their perceptions of the role and structure, benefits and intended outcomes, and challenges of internships in undergraduate business education.

I also interviewed students that have completed at least one internship course offered by the college. A future study with students that have not completed an internship course offered by the college could help to gain insight into how other students perceive internships in

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undergraduate business education. Many students participate in internships during their junior or senior year of college. A future study could explore the benefits of internship participation during the freshman and sophomore years. An increasing number of employers are seeking talent earlier in the student's academic year. Therefore, a future study that examines the benefits and challenges from the administrator, student, and employer perspective could be helpful in further understanding the role of internships in undergraduate business education. In addition, a future study with more student voices may prove beneficial in gaining additional insight into challenges and recommendations for improvements. In contrast, a study that focuses solely on employer perceptions of the role, structure, benefits, challenges, and intended outcomes of internships in undergraduate business education could provide more valuable insight from companies of various sizes, industries, and levels of involvement in internship programs. Research that focuses on the employer's perceptions of internships is scarce. Therefore, further insight in this area could add valuable insight to the existing body of knowledge.

Feedback from administrators and employers showed that many faculty members are not involved in the internship process due to more focused attention on research. Two administrators also shared that participation in a faculty internship was helpful in their ability to understand better the process that students go through and the important role that internship can play. Another future research possibility could explore ways to increase faculty interest in supporting/participating in internship programs and employer interest in providing faculty internship opportunities.

**Closing Thoughts**

This study was a single, qualitative case study conducted to examine administrator, employer, and student perceptions of internships in undergraduate business education. This study

was exploratory in nature, but it helped the researcher learn more about the internship program in the Grant University College of Business and how administrators, employers, and students perceived the role and structure, benefits and intended outcomes, and challenges of internships in undergraduate business education. While this study was limited to a single case, it did reveal key benefits and challenges related to the college's current program while providing recommendations that could be used to make improvements and implement new strategies. Previous studies show that internships have become a common feature in undergraduate business education (Hergert, 2009; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008) with 92% of business schools offering internship experiences (Coco, 2000). Since AACSB's recommendation to increase experiential learning in business, internships have played a significant role in addressing this directive (Hergert, 2009).

Research on internship programs in undergraduate business education is not a new occurrence. However, research related to internship programs administered in a large AACSB accredited business school located at a research 1 institution is less identifiable. Although research is a primary focus of the institution under study, internships have not lost their importance. Instead, they gradually continue to gain support despite the challenges associated with a lack of funding.

This research also gathered insight from administrators, students, and employers while other studies have focused primarily on one group or the other. With new trends in recruiting, revised recommendations for accreditation, and new generations of students entering the workforce, suggestions for improvement have evolved demonstrating a greater need for multiple voices in the conversation around internship program development. It is my opinion that the internship program within the Grant University College of Business, and other business schools worldwide,

could benefit greatly from the insight gained from this study This study supports the findings and brings to light the need for administrators and employers to rethink traditional methods of teaching, training, recruiting, and administering in order to meet the needs of an ever-changing labor market.

Requiring internships for all students in the Grant University College of Business was an area that most research participants supported; however, many respondents quickly came to the realization that requiring more than 6000 students to complete an internship would be impracticable without additional funding, staffing, and internship opportunities. Perhaps, a focus on internships in business education is too narrow, and other forms of experiential learning should be introduced into the fold? With more creative thinking, the College of Business can continue to move forward in helping students gain valuable experience that will aid in their ability to produce graduates poised for the rigors of today's competitive workforce.

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# APPENDICES

**Appendix A: Administrator and Employer Recruitment Email**

Subject: Internship Research

Study Title: A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education

Dear _____,

My name is Kawana Johnson and I am a doctoral candidate in the Career &Workforce Education Program at the University of South Florida.  I am conducting a research study as part of the Ph.D. requirements and would greatly appreciate your participation in this study. I am studying administrator, employer, and student perceptions of internships in undergraduate business education. I am specifically interested in learning more about the role and structure of internships in undergraduate business education, benefits, and challenges.

Pro# 00032917

If you decide to participate, you will participate in an interview that will last no longer than 1 hour. The interview will be audio recorded and participation will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be provided and information will be kept in a secure location. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity and institution will remain anonymous.

This study is voluntary and you may decline or quite participating at any time if you are not comfortable answering questions.

This study was approved by the USF IRB (IRB#00032917) on November 15, 2017. If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact me at kawana@mail.usf.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Edward C. Fletcher at 813-974-0029 or ecfletcher@usf.edu. I you have concerns, complains, questions or wish to discuss your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Office at 813-974-5638.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kawana Johnson

**Appendix B: Student Focus Group Recruitment Email**

Subject: Internship Focus Group Invitation

Study Title: A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education

Dear _____,

As a business major and former intern, you have a great opportunity to contribute your thoughts to research on internships in undergraduate business education!

My name is Kawana Johnson, a PhD student at the University of South Florida, and I'd like to invite you to participate in a focus group designed to identify the roles, challenges, and benefits of internships in business education. You are being asked to participate because of your previous internship experience and the insight you can provide as a business major.

Pro# 00032917

This is a voluntary research study, but your feedback could prove valuable in improving internship opportunities for future business students. If you are interested in participating, please let me know by emailing your name, major, and classification *(e.g. sophomore, junior, senior)* to kawana@mail.usf.edu by _date_. This will be a 2-hour time commitment scheduled during a mutually agreed upon timeframe based on your availability and interest. If selected, you will be notified by _date_ and given additional details.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me via email or phone at 850-443-7564.

Thank you in advance for your interest and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Kawana Johnson

**Appendix C: Administrator and Employer Confirmation Email**

Subject: Internship Interview Confirmation

Study Title: A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study about internships in undergraduate business education. As stated in my previous email, the risks are minimal and with your consent, I will audio record the session. The interview will be transcribed and you will receive a copy of the transcript to make any edits that you see fit prior to analysis. Attached you will find a copy of the informed consent that outlines this research in more detail. Please take some time to review prior to our scheduled interview session. If you have questions, please let me know and I'll be happy to clarify. If you agree to the terms, please sign a copy and return to me during our interview session. I will also have a copy of the informed consent ready for signature at our interview session. As a reminder, your name and the institutions name will remain anonymous. Information will be discarded at the completion of this study.

This interview will take no longer than 1 hour. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Please let me know a day time that works best with your schedule and I will do my best to be available.

Sincerely,


Kawana Johnson

**Appendix D: Administrator and Employer Reminder Email**

Subject: Internship Interview Reminder

Dear _____,

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research about internships in undergraduate business education. As a reminder, your interview has been scheduled for *date* at *time*, in *location*. Attached you will find a copy of the informed consent. This document outlines the research in more detail. At your convenience, please review and bring a signed copy to our scheduled interview. If you have any questions about the details outlined in this document, please let me know by emailing me at kawana@mail.usf.edu or calling 850-443-7564. I want to ensure that all the details related to this study are clear prior to our interview meeting.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and I look forward to seeing you soon!

Sincerely,

Kawana Johnson

**Appendix E: Student Focus Group Confirmation Email**

Subject: Internship Focus Group Confirmation

Study Title: A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study about internships in undergraduate business education. As stated in my previous email, the risks are minimal and with your consent, I will audio record the session. The focus group session will be transcribed and you will receive a copy of the transcript to make any edits that you see fit prior to analysis. Attached you will find a copy of the informed consent that outlines this research in more detail. Please take some time to review prior to our scheduled interview session. If you have questions, please let me know and I'll be happy to clarify. If you agree to the terms, please sign a copy and return to me during our interview session. I will also have a copy of the informed consent ready for signature at our interview session. As a reminder, your name and the institutions name will remain anonymous. Information will be discarded at the completion of this study.

This interview will take no longer than 2 hours and your participation is greatly appreciated. Please let me know your availability on February 26th, 27th, and 28th and I will confirm a time that works best for each participant.

Sincerely,


Kawana Johnson

**Appendix F: Student Focus Group Reminder Email**

Subject: Internship Focus Group Interview Reminder

Dear _____,

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research about internships in undergraduate business education. As a reminder, your focus group has been scheduled for *date* at *time*, in *location*. Attached you will find a copy of the informed consent. This document outlines the research in more detail. At your convenience, please review and bring a signed copy to our scheduled interview. If you have any questions about the details outlined in this document, please let me know by emailing me at kawana@mail.usf.edu or calling 850-443-7564. I want to ensure that all the details related to this study are clear prior to our interview meeting.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and I look forward to seeing you soon!

Sincerely,

Kawana Johnson

**Appendix G: Demographic Information Follow-up email**

Subject: Demographic Information

As part of my dissertation research, I will need to include demographic information for each interview participant. At your convenience, please provide answers to the following questions to ensure that my information is accurate.

Thank you again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Kawana Johnson

**Please select the appropriate response and/or fill in the blank.**

**Category:** Administrator, Employer

**Gender:** Male, Female

**Age Group:** 15-24; 25-34; 35-44; 55-64; 65 and over

**Ethnic Background:** Asian, Black/African American; Hispanic; White/Caucasian; Other

**Years of work experience:** 0-4; 5-10; 11-15; 16-20; 21 and over

**Employment category:** Staff, Teaching Faculty; Assistant Professor; Associate Professor; Professor; Professor Emeritus; Dean, Employer
Employer Job Title: _____

**Employment status:** Full-time; Part-time

**Academic Department (if applicable):** Finance, Accounting, Marketing, Management, Risk Management/Insurance, Real Estate & Legal Studies; Business Analytics, Information Systems, & Supply Chain

**Appendix H: Dean's Interview Protocol**

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. As you are aware, I will explore your perceptions of internships in undergraduate business education at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States. I appreciate you sharing your valuable time with me and look forward to involving you in this research. I will audio record this interview and the recording will be transcribed. The transcript will be shared with you soon thereafter for member checking. If you would like to make any changes to the transcript or corrections, please let me know by responding via email. Otherwise the transcript will only be shared with my advisor, if necessary. What you share will be kept in confidence and a pseudonym will be provided for both your name and the institution. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

I. **Background question**

1. Tell me about your experiences past and present with internships in undergraduate business education.

II. **Role and Structure of Internships**

2. Please describe your view of the role and structure of internships in the College of Business and how you see that role/structure changing in the near future.
   i. Probe: Do you believe that internship program on the academic side should be similar or does it depend on the program/school?
   ii. Probe: Do you believe that internship programs on the employer side should be similar or does it depend on the organization?

III. **Challenges**

3. Reflect on the whole of your experience as an administrator within the College and describe one to three challenges that the College faces in regard to implementation o fa comprehensive internship program.
   iii. Probe: How do you feel about remote/virtual internships?
   iv. Probe: How important are alumni in internship development?
   v. Probe: What are your thoughts on paid vs. unpaid internships?
   vi. Probe: Should a PD class be required before participating in an internship?
   vii. Probe: How early should we be tracking internship participation.

IV. **Benefits**

4. What benefits have you seen as a result of implementing an internship and career services office within the College.

V. **Ideal Program**

5. Describe your view of the ideal internship program within the Grant University College of Business.

**Appendix H** *(Continued)*

    **VI.**    **Additional Information**

        6.  Would you like to share anything else regarding internships or experiential learning general?

**Appendix I: Administrator Interview Protocol**

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. As you are aware, I will explore your perceptions of internships in undergraduate business education at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States. I appreciate you sharing your valuable time with me and look forward to involving you in this research. I will audio record this interview and the recording will be transcribed. The transcript will be shared with you soon thereafter for member checking. If you would like to make any changes to the transcript or corrections, please let me know by responding via email. Otherwise the transcript will only be shared with my advisor, if necessary. What you share will be kept in confidence and a pseudonym will be provided for both your name and the institution. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

I. **Background question**

1. Tell me about your professional background and how long you have been working with interns.

II. **Role and Structure of Internships**

2. Please describe your view of the role and structure of internships in the College of Business and how you see that role/structure changing in the near future.
    i. Probe: Do you believe that internship program on the academic side should be similar or does it depend on the program/school?
    ii. Probe: Do you believe that internship programs on the employer side should be similar or does it depend on the organization?

III. **Challenges**

3. From your view, describe the most challenging thing about working with employers to develop and promote internship opportunities for students in your department.

    iii. Probe: How do you feel about remote/virtual internships?
    iv. Probe: How important are alumni in internship development?
    v. Probe: What are your thoughts on paid vs. unpaid internships?
    vi. Probe: Should a PD class be required before participating in an internship?
    vii. Probe: How early should we be tracking internship participation.

IV. **Benefits**

4. Please describe 1 to 3 of the most rewarding outcomes that your department has experienced as a result of internship programs.

viii.     Probe: What one piece of advice do you share with your students prior to them leaving on internship?

## V.  Ideal Program

5.  Describe your view of the ideal internship program within the Grant University College of Business.

## VI. Additional Information

6.  Would you like to share anything else regarding internships or experiential learning in general?

**Appendix J: Employer Interview Protocol**

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. As you are aware, I will explore your perceptions of internships in undergraduate business education at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States. I appreciate you sharing your valuable time with me and look forward to involving you in this research. I will audio record this interview and the recording will be transcribed. The transcript will be shared with you soon thereafter for member checking. If you would like to make any changes to the transcript or corrections, please let me know by responding via email. Otherwise the transcript will only be shared with my advisor, if necessary. What you share will be kept in confidence and a pseudonym will be provided for both your name and the institution. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

## I. Background

1. Tell me about your role and how long you have worked for this company.
    i. Probe: Tell me more about this company.
    ii. Probe: How long have you been recruiting Grant University College of Business interns?

## II. Role and Structure of Internships

2. Please describe the role and structure of your organization's internship program.
    iii. Probe: Do you have a formal or more informal orientation process for your interns?
    iv. Probe: Are your internships paid or unpaid?
    v. Probe: How do you feel about unpaid internships?
3. Please describe your experience in working with interns.
    vi. Probe: Have you had any bad experiences? If so, please describe.
    vii. Probe: What could the College do better to prepare students for internship experiences?
    viii. Probe: Have you hired any interns full-time?
    ix. Probe: If so, how often does this occur?

## III. Challenges

4. From your view, describe the most challenging thing about working with business schools to recruit interns?
    x. Probe: What recruiting methods do you use?
    xi. Probe: What does your interview process involve?
    xii. Probe: For employers that do not offer internships, what do you believe their reasons might be?

## IV. Benefits

5. What impact do you see or anticipate internships having on your company's growth and development?

**Appendix J** *(Continued)*

### V.  Additional Information

6.  Would you like to share anything else regarding internships or experiential learning in general?
    xiii.  Probe: Do you think business schools should require students to complete an internship?

**Appendix K: Student Focus Group Protocol**

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this focus group. As you are aware, I will explore your perceptions of internships in undergraduate business education at a Research 1 institution located in the southeastern United States. I appreciate you sharing your valuable time with me and look forward to involving you in this research. Focus groups allow for group interaction allowing new ideas to emerge as a result of feedback provided by fellow participants. Group interaction is essential and I encourage you to communicate directly with each other. I will audio record this interview and the recording will be transcribed. The transcript will be shared with you soon thereafter for member checking. If you would like to make any changes to the transcript or corrections, please let me know by responding via email. Otherwise the transcript will only be shared with my advisor, if necessary. What you share will be kept in confidence and a pseudonym will be provided for both your name and the institution. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

I. **Background question**

1. Let's go around the room and do some brief introductions. Start by telling us your name, major, and classification.

II. **Benefits**

2. What are some of the benefits that you have received as a result of participating in an internship?

   i. Probe: Did you get a full-time job offer from your internship experience?
   ii. Probe: If not, do you still have those professional relationships?

3. What impact do you see, or anticipate, your internship participation having on your future career development?

   iii. Probe: Do you feel that you have been professionally developed here at school?
4. Describe the influence, if any, that the college played in your ability to secure your internship and gain the most meaning.
   iv. Probe: How helpful were the university resources in helping you find an internship (e.g. Career Fair, job postings, etc)
   v. What role did your internship supervisor play in your overall professional development?

III. **Challenges**

5. What are some of the challenges that you have experienced as a result of participating in an internship program?
   vi. Probe: Do you feel that students should be required to do an internship?

**Appendix K** *(Continued)*

        vii.  Probe: How do you propose helping students become more professional?

**IV.**    **Additional Information**

**6.**  Would you like to share anything else regarding internships or experiential learning in general?

**Appendix L: Administrator Informed Consent**



**Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk**

**Pro #  00032917**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher to discuss this consent form with you. Also please ask her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

I am asking you to take part in a research study called:

*"A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education"*

The person who is in charge of this research study is Kawana W. Johnson. This person is called the Principal Investigator. Kawana is being guided in this research by Dr. Edward C. Fletcher.

The research will be conducted at the Florida State University College of Business.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to describe, analyze, and draw conclusions about internships in undergraduate business education. I hope to identify the role, challenges, and benefits of internships in undergraduate business education.

**Why are you being asked to take part?**

You are being asked to participate in this research because your insight will assist in identifying the role, challenges, and benefits of internships in undergraduate business education from the perspective of a school administrator.

**Appendix L** *(Continued)*

**Study Procedures:**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 1-hour long interview. The interview will be audio recorded.

**Total Number of Participants**

Students, employers, and school administrators are being asked to participate. About 20 individuals will take part in this study.

**Alternatives/Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal**

You do not have to participate in this research study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

**Benefits**

We are unsure if you will receive any personal benefits by taking part in this research study. However, we hope that the findings will aid the College in enhancing existing internship programs.

**Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

**Compensation**

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include the Principal Investigator and Faculty Supervisor.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Kawana Johnson at 850-443-7564.

**Appendix L** *(Continued)*

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

### Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

### And Authorization to Collect, Use and Share Your Information for Research

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____          _____

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study                                                    Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

### Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____          _____

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent                                       Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

**Appendix M: Employer Informed Consent**



**Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk**

**Pro #  00032917_____**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher to discuss this consent form with you. Also please ask her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

I am asking you to take part in a research study called:

*"A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education"*

The person who is in charge of this research study is Kawana W. Johnson**.** This person is called the Principal Investigator. Kawana is being guided in this research by Dr. Edward C. Fletcher.

The research will be conducted at the Florida State University College of Business.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to describe, analyze, and draw conclusions about internships in undergraduate business education. I hope to identify the role, challenges, and benefits of internships in undergraduate business education.

**Why are you being asked to take part?**

You are being asked to participate in this research because your insight will assist in identifying the role, challenges, and benefits of internships in undergraduate business education from the perspective of an employer.

**Study Procedures:**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

**Appendix M** *(Continued)*

- Participate in a 1-hour long interview
- Participate in 1, 2-hour focus group

Each interview and focus group will be audio recorded.

## Total Number of Participants

Students, employers, and school administrators are being asked to participate. About 20 individuals will take part in this study.

## Alternatives/Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time.  There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

## Benefits

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

## Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

## Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

## Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records.  Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential.  These individuals include the Principal Investigator and Faculty Supervisor.

Because of the focus group setting, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. However, we ask that you keep what is discussed during the group confidential and not disclosed to others outside of the group.

We may publish what we learn from this study.  If we do, we will not include your name.  We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Kawana Johnson at 850-443-7564.

**Appendix M** *(Continued)*

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

### Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

### And Authorization to Collect, Use and Share Your Information for Research

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____       _____

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study                                                    Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

### Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____       _____

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent                                        Date

_____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

**Appendix N: Student Informed Consent**



**Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk**

**Pro #  __00032917_____**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher to discuss this consent form with you. Also please ask her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

I am asking you to take part in a research study called:

*"A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education"*

The person who is in charge of this research study is Kawana W. Johnson**.** This person is called the Principal Investigator. Kawana is being guided in this research by Dr. Edward C. Fletcher.

The research will be conducted at the Florida State University College of Business.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to describe, analyze, and draw conclusions about internships in undergraduate business education. I hope to identify the role, challenges, and benefits of internships in undergraduate business education.

**Why are you being asked to take part?**

You are being asked to participate in this research because your insight will assist in identifying the role, challenges, and benefits of internships in undergraduate business education from the student perspective.

**Appendix N** *(Continued)*

**Study Procedures:**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 2-hour long focus group. The group session will be audio recorded.

**Total Number of Participants**

Students, employers, and school administrators are being asked to participate. About 20 individuals will take part in this study.

**Alternatives/Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal**

You do not have to participate in this research study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time.  There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status, course grade, recommendations, or access to future courses or training opportunities.

**Benefits**

We are unsure if you will receive any personal benefits by taking part in this research study. However, we hope that the findings will aid the College in enhancing existing internship programs.

**Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

**Compensation**

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records.  Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential.  These individuals include the Principal Investigator and Faculty Supervisor.

Because of the group setting, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. However, we ask

that you keep what is discussed during the group confidential and not disclosed to others outside of the group.

We may publish what we learn from this study.  If we do, we will not include your name.  We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

**Appendix N** *(Continued)*

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Kawana Johnson at 850-443-7564.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

### Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

### And Authorization to Collect, Use and Share Your Information for Research

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____     _____
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study                                                              Date

_____
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

### Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____     _____
Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent                                                     Date

_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

**Appendix O: Thank You Email**

Subject: Thank You Email

Study Title: A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education

Dear _____,

Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in my research study. I greatly appreciate you sharing your thoughts about internships in undergraduate business education and know that your feedback will contribute richness to my overall study.

As mentioned in the interview, all information will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used. Again thank you for your assistance and I hope that you have a day!

Sincerely,


Kawana Johnson

## Appendix P: IRB Approval Letter

**USF**
**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA**

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

November 15, 2017

Kawana Johnson
L-CACHE - Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career & Higher Education
Tampa, FL 33612

RE:     **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**
IRB#:  Pro00032917
Title:   A Case Study Exploration of Internships in Undergraduate Business Education

**Study Approval Period: 11/15/2017 to 11/15/2018**

Dear Mrs. Johnson:

On 11/15/2017, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

**Approved Item(s):**
**Protocol Document(s):**
Protocol, Version #1, 10.24.17.pdf

**Consent/Assent Document(s)\*:**
Employer Informed Consent_Version 1_Date 11-9-17.pdf.pdf
School Administrator Informed Consent_Version 1_Date 11-9-17.pdf.pdf
Student Informed Consent_Version 1_Date 11-9-17.pdf.pdf

\*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research

proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board