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What is an Internship? An Inventory and Analysis of "Internship" Opportunities Available to Ontario Postsecondary Students

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Executive Summary

The connection between classroom learning and practical experience in the workplace has been recognized as a significant aspect of student development in postsecondary institutions (Kuh, 2008). Internships have been associated with many benefits for each party involved, including the student, postsecondary institution and industry professional. Internships provide opportunities for students to transfer theoretical knowledge to a practical setting; they serve as recruitment avenues for postsecondary institutions and provide industry professionals with access to high-quality students with current academic knowledge. Despite the perceived importance of internships for student development, researchers and practitioners have a limited understanding of what constitutes an "internship" and of how to deliver these experiences effectively. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to examine the internship opportunities currently offered by direct-entry programmes (e.g., undergraduate degree or diploma) in Ontario postsecondary institutions.

The first phase of data collection involved examining all opportunities labeled as "internships" and described on the websites of the 44 postsecondary colleges and universities in Ontario. This search did not include any programmes labeled as other forms of work-integrated learning, such as apprenticeship, placement, co-operative experience, practicum, service learning course, etc. Information regarding the definitions, prerequisites and conditions associated with each student internship programme was collected. In total, 369 internship programmes were identified.

The second phase of data collection involved retrieving the outlines for the internship programmes listed on the postsecondary institution websites. 77 programme outlines were collected. The content of the internship course outlines was analyzed using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory to determine the educational conditions of the internship programmes and to identify ways in which the educational quality of student internships may be improved. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory was chosen as the guiding framework as it is widely applied to student development in higher education settings (Cantor, 1995; Healey & Jenkins, 2000; Hopkins, 1999; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Kuh, 2008; Lempert, 1996; Priest & Gass, 1997). The theory consists of a four-stage cycle: concrete experience (CE – feeling dimension), reflective observation (RO – reflecting/watching dimension), abstract conceptualization (AC – thinking dimension) and active experimentation (AE – doing dimension). An optimal learning experience requires adequate representation of abilities from all four stages of the cycle.

The results of this study indicated substantial variation in internship prerequisites and conditions both within and across all academic disciplines. For example, discrepancies in salary (e.g., $0-$60,000+), number of hours required for internship completion (e.g., 10 hours-1,000 hours), length of the internship (e.g., 1 month-16 months), and fees to participate (e.g., $1-$10,000), were some of the variable aspects identified. In addition, the educational activities and conditions required for completion of the internship programmes varied significantly.

Looking at the educational conditions included in the internship programme outlines, findings revealed that there was adequate representation of learning activities addressing the concrete experience and reflective observation modes of learning, and insufficient representation of the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation modes. This is reflective of a lack of emphasis on linking the internship practice with classroom learning and an overemphasis on the practical level of the experience. The lack of representation of all four learning modes indicates that the conditions for optimal learning are not currently being met within most Ontario higher education internship programmes.

The findings of this study indicate that most internship programmes currently offered through Ontario postsecondary institutions do have some educational benefits. However, the programmes require several improvements with respect to design and delivery to provide an optimal learning experience.

- **Recommendation #1: Establish explicit learning activities that target each stage of Kolb's experiential learning theory.**

  Designing internship programmes that provide high-quality educational experiences begins with grounding the design and delivery in experiential learning theory. Recommendations for design and delivery of internships include establishing explicit learning tasks and activities that target each of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning modes, such as gaining hands-on practice, opportunities for reflection, drawing connections between coursework and the internship experience, as well as developing and implementing creative ideas in practice.

- **Recommendation #2: Establish clear roles and responsibilities for all parties involved in the internship (i.e., student, institution and employer).**

  It is important to establish clear roles and responsibilities for each party involved. It is proposed that postsecondary institutions be responsible for creating the educational conditions for the internship. This would include but is not limited to: outlining learning objectives and outcomes; creating opportunities for critical reflection; encouraging the generation and implementation of new ideas; and establishing activities that promote intersection between the internship and coursework. With this pre-determined academic framework, the role of the industry professionals would be to consult with the course coordinator and the student to establish challenging day-to-day tasks that allow the student to meet learning objectives. Further, the industry professional would be required to monitor these activities and provide feedback to the student throughout engagement in the internship. Finally, the main responsibilities of the student would be to maintain communication between themselves and the stakeholders, complete related coursework and meet the expectations of the internship supervisor (e.g., arrive on time, fulfill daily duties). Working collaboratively to emphasize the educational quality of the internship experience will ensure that the internship is beneficial for all parties involved.

- **Recommendation #3: Emphasize the Standards of Education over the Standards of Employment.**

  The final recommendation involves shifting the focus from the Standards of Employment to the Standards of Education. This requires the creation of a new overarching set of standards to monitor the design and implementation of internship programmes. Designing and delivering internship programmes according to these recommendations will assist in shifting the focus from internship variations to a focus on academic standards that can be monitored and maintained across all internships, regardless of the academic discipline. By focusing on educational quality, several criticisms commonly raised both in research and in media, including lack of proper supervision, theoretical relevance and planning, engagement in meaningless tasks, right to compensation, and intern exploitation, will be mitigated. Further, this approach to design and delivery of internships would ensure that all students have access to a high-quality educational experience.

In terms of future directions for research, the development and evaluation of an internship programme toolkit is warranted. This toolkit would provide stakeholders with tangible tools, such as samples of course content, best-practice guidelines and learning activity templates, for implementing high-quality educational internships. From a theoretical perspective, it is important to explore the resources required by the postsecondary institutions to implement these educational experiences.

Above all, this report indicates that the design and delivery of student internship programmes varies significantly both within and across academic disciplines, and often overlooks important educational requirements outlined by experiential learning frameworks. It is no longer acceptable simply to assume that students will make connections between classroom learning and practical experience implicitly. Instead, internship programmes must be designed and implemented in a deliberate and structured manner, informed by experiential learning theory, to ensure that every student has an opportunity for an optimal learning experience.

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Introduction

The importance of integrating students' classroom learning with real-world practical experience has been recognized as a vital component of student engagement and development in higher education (Kuh, 2008). One of the ways in which students may bridge their learning in the classroom with professional practice is through student internships (Baird, 1996; Paris & Adams, 1994).

Internships are an increasingly common experience for postsecondary students (Hergert, 2009) and have been recognized as an integral aspect of educational and professional development (Jowdy, McDonald & Spence, 2004; Schmutte, 1986). Despite the perceived importance of internships for student development, there is little consensus about what constitutes an internship, which in turn complicates the matter for institutions looking to integrate them into their curriculum effectively. As *Huffington Post* journalist Ashley Mosley (2013) has indicated, "the definition of 'intern' is broken, and it needs to be fixed before we can successfully move internship programs into the future." Similarly, O'Neill (2010) discusses the importance of coming up with a definition of internship as a first step in assuring quality and high-impact practice.

The vague understanding of what constitutes a student internship and of the role of student interns in the workplace raises significant concerns about the rights and safety of interns. Several instances of intern exploitation have been highlighted recently in the media. For example, a hotel management student described the questionable educational value of her experience cleaning toilets and floors at a Toronto hotel during her unpaid internship (McKnight, 2013). The same article, published in the *Toronto Star*, suggested that unpaid interns are particularly vulnerable to negative experiences as they are not protected by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, which applies only to individuals who "perform work or supply services for monetary compensation" (McKnight, 2013). In addition, many unpaid interns are excluded from the protection of the Ontario Employment Standards Act and the Ontario Workers Act, which do not apply to individuals who perform work as part of a program approved by a college of applied arts and technology or a university (Government of Ontario, 2000). This exception exists to "encourage employers to provide students enrolled in a college or university program with practical training to complement their classroom learning", but the extent to which internship educational experiences are tied to the curricular learning of the student is not always clear.

Student interns' feelings of exploitation do not relate solely to workplace protection and the tasks they are asked to perform. Some think that paying fees for a university or college course that then requires them to provide uncompensated labour in the workplace is unfair. A recent article in the *New York Times* (Carr, 2013) suggested that unpaid internship opportunities present issues of discrimination, as the majority of young people seeking internships cannot afford to work for free. Further, Carr (2013) suggested that by not offering paid internships, employers overlook an opportunity to obtain interns with diverse perspectives (e.g., geographical, class, race) that could strengthen the company. Speaking on the issue of intern protection and compensation, the Premier of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne, has indicated that concerns should focus on the educational quality of internships, regardless of whether the intern is paid or unpaid (McKnight, 2013). Further, Premier Wynne indicated that colleges and universities are responsible for ensuring high-quality internship experiences for students (McKnight, 2013).

In order to protect the rights and safety of interns and ensure that internships are high-quality educational experiences, it is important to identify the types of learning experiences that are considered internships; the goals of these internship experiences; and the extent to which these experiences are indeed beneficial for all parties involved (i.e., students, employers and institutions).

The purpose of this research was to assess the definitions, conditions and intended outcomes of student internship programmes. A web-based analysis was conducted of current "internship" opportunities facilitated by direct-entry postsecondary education programmes in Ontario colleges and universities. This method of evaluation was chosen to capture detailed data across all Ontario colleges and universities efficiently. This research method has been supported empirically in the conduct of higher education research, as information drawn from institution websites has been shown to be a reliable reflection of institutional goals and policies (Chapleo, Durán & Díaz 2011; Mitra, 2005; Schultz, Hatch & Larsen 2000) – in this case, those pertaining to the purpose and promotion of internship opportunities.

To supplement the web-based analysis, programme outlines were collected from the postsecondary student internship programmes identified. The educational conditions and intended learning outcomes highlighted in the internship programme outlines were situated within Kolb's (1984) four-stage experiential learning theory and examples of best educational practice were identified. Based on these best practice examples, strategies for enhancing the educational quality of internship programmes in Ontario colleges and universities were proposed. Experiential learning theory was used as the grounding theoretical framework for this research as it clearly outlines the process by which students learn most effectively through experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) – a theory that applies well to enhancing the educational quality of work-integrated learning opportunities such as student internships.

A review of the literature on postsecondary student internships was first completed to inform the framing of the study.

Review of Literature

Our review of the literature included 297 journal articles, 14 books and book chapters, and 16 institutional reports describing student internships. The following section is a review of this literature, including: a discussion of the ways in which "internship" is defined; reasons for which the Ontario government should be interested in student internship programming; the perceived benefits of these experiences for all parties involved; student perspectives of internship "must-haves"; and the institutional challenges for providing high-quality internship experiences. This section will end with a summary of the literature reviewed.

How is an "Internship" Defined?

Despite a broad base of research related to student internships, no standard definition of "internship" exists. Several researchers have tackled this question, as indicated below:

- Internships involve professional employment and supervision in a vast array of academic disciplines; interns tend to be employed in an organization part time and receive academic credit for their contribution in the workplace; compensation is optional for interns (Gault, Leach & Duey, 2010, p. 77).
- Internships are understood to be "engaging students in service activities primarily for the purpose of providing them with hands-on experiences that enhance their learning or understanding of the issues relevant to a particular area of study" (Furco, 1996, p. 4).
- Internship opportunities assist students in refining their career goals, developing professional skills and clarifying their personal values in the workplace (Hall, 1976; Kane et al., 1992).
- Internships are defined as "structured and career-relevant work experience obtained by students prior to graduation from an academic program" (Taylor, 1988, p. 393).

Further, a recent HEQCO-funded study on work-integrated learning in Ontario's postsecondary sector defined an "internship" as follows:

- Internships are "work experiences, often a year or more in duration, planned to occur at or near the end of a program of study. They are offered in professional fields, with supervisors encouraged to provide meaningful support as well as supervision. They engage students in meaningful work, but can also include job shadowing" (Sattler, 2011, p. 46).

The various definitions of "internship" share some common elements, as well as a number of discrepancies. There was consensus among all the definitions reviewed that internships are meant to be educational and should provide structured, meaningful and career-relevant experiences for students. On the other hand, discrepancies exist regarding the suggested time commitments (e.g., full time or part time, duration of internship), compensation (e.g., paid or unpaid), and the specific academic requirements of students who engage in internships (e.g., timing of internship in academic program, opportunity for course credit). Notably, in addition to the different definitions of "internship" employed, the lack of a standardized definition of what an internship entails is further complicated by the fact that it is not always clearly distinguished from other work-integrated learning opportunities such as co-operative education, apprenticeships, placements and practica. Please see Sattler (2011) for more information on other work-integrated learning opportunities in Ontario's postsecondary sector.

Although the definition of "internship" remains unclear, there is strong evidence to support the potential benefits of internships in postsecondary education. Previous literature identifies numerous educational and professional benefits that may be gleaned from students' internship experiences (Jowdy, McDonald & Spence, 2004; Schmutte, 1986), and students appear to be increasingly interested in seeking ways to gain an edge in the job market by acquiring valuable employment experience prior to graduation. It is therefore particularly important for government officials and higher education institutions to ensure the educational quality and effectiveness of student internship programming, so that the potential benefits of these experiences are realized for all stakeholders. The following section will describe a recent survey that highlights the growing interest in internship experiences among Ontario postsecondary students.

Reasons for Government Interest in Student Internships

Currently, there are over 580,000 full-time students enrolled in postsecondary education in Ontario (Hicks, Weingarten, Jonker & Liu, 2013; Weingarten, Hicks, Jonker & Liu, 2013). Recent research conducted by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario on the interest and participation of Ontario postsecondary students in work-integrated learning opportunities indicated that 47.6% of students in direct-entry postsecondary programmes will have completed a work-integrated learning experience by graduation.[1] This does not take into account the vast number of work-integrated learning opportunities offered by second-entry/graduate programmes.

Of all participants in the HEQCO study (n= 10,327), 9.8% characterized their work-integrated learning experience as an "internship." An examination of student respondents who engaged in internships suggested that opportunities are offered in various employment sectors. Internships in the private sector were most common, with 53% of students participating in this area. Other areas where students held internships were non-profit groups (16%), on-campus organizations (13%), health care (5%) and simulated work environments (2%). Interestingly, at both Ontario colleges and Ontario universities, there seemed to be more internship than co-op experiences reported. This is particularly interesting to note given the vast amount of attention paid to co-op education in postsecondary curriculum.

[1] Unpublished data collected by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Overall, the survey demonstrated that several workplace sectors are willing to receive student interns. Due to the interest from employers and students regarding internships, it is important to examine the potential benefits derived from these experiences. Several studies have explored the benefits of internships for all parties involved (i.e., students, institutions and employers) and the empirical evidence from these studies will be outlined in the following section.

Benefits of Student Internships

From a broad standpoint, internships can be beneficial for all parties (i.e., student, institution and employer), as they are believed to provide higher quality education and career preparation (Gault et al., 2000), build stronger resumes (Coco, 2000; Divine et al., 2007) and generate new ideas within organizations (Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002; Sattler, 2011; Thiel & Hartley, 1997). In addition, numerous empirical benefits have been cited for each particular stakeholder group, as listed below:

Benefits of internships for students:

- Bridge classroom learning with professional practice (Baird, 1996; Kuh, 2008; Paris & Adams, 1994)
- Opportunity to solidify knowledge learned in the classroom (Sattler, 2011; Schmutte, 1986)
- Develop an awareness of personal values (Taylor, 1988)
- Enhance understanding of personal characteristics (e.g., strengths or weaknesses) (Tovey, 2001)
- Increase exposure to ethical matters (Raymond, McNabb & Matthaei, 1993)
- Opportunity for career exploration (Sattler, 2011)
- Increase marketability based on job-related skill development (Maskooki, Rama Raghunandan, 1998; Perry, 1989; Swift & Kent, 1999)
- Increase perceived employability (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Gault, Redington & Schlager, 2000; Maskooki, Rama, & Raghunandan, 1998; Sattler, 2011; Taylor, 1988)
- Expedite employment following graduation (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Knouse, Tanner & Harris, 1999; Taylor, 1988)
- Enhance understanding of realistic expectations in the workplace (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Maskooki, Rama & Raghunandan, 1998)
- Assist transition from postsecondary education to workplace (Paulson & Baker, 1999)
- Higher salaries (Coco, 2000; Gault et al., 2000)
- Higher job satisfaction (Divine et al., 2007; Gault et al., 2000)

Benefits of internships for institutions:

- Higher quality students (Gault et al., 2000; Thiel & Hartley, 1997)
- Increase communication with businesses in the community (Divine et al., 2007; Schmutte, 1986; Thiel & Hartley, 1997)
- Allow opportunities for curriculum content evaluation and program improvement (Schmutte, 1986; Divine et al., 2007; Sattler, 2011)
- Expand student recruitment (Divine et al., 2007)
- Develop a distinguished reputation (Divine et al., 2007; Thiel & Hartley, 1997; Sattler, 2011)

Benefits of internships for employers:

- Access to high-quality students for temporary employment (Coco, 2000; Knemeyer & Murphy, 2002; Schmutte, 1986)

- Obtain students with current theoretical knowledge of the workforce (Sattler, 2011)
- Access to the perspectives of a younger population (e.g., greater understanding of social networking) (Sattler, 2011)
- Opportunity to evaluate employee training protocols (Schmutte, 1986)
- Development and maintenance of a positive reputation (Schmutte, 1986)
- Enhance morale among colleagues (e.g., older employees mentoring interns) (Sattler, 2011)
- Opportunity to select high-quality students upon graduation (Coco, 2000; Gault et al., 2000; Sattler, 2011)

There are several potential benefits for each stakeholder involved in the internship experience. In order to realize these potential benefits, however, it is critical to consider the ways in which internships are designed and implemented. Students have outlined specific goals they wish to achieve in their internships. These specific student goals will be detailed in the following section.

What Do Students Look for When Seeking a Student Internship?

Although satisfaction does not equal quality, from a student perspective one might argue that an internship is considered more worthwhile when a student is satisfied with his or her internship experience (Clark, 2003). From a broad standpoint, when seeking an internship experience, students desire mentorship from an employee at the internship organization (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Snyder, 1999), expect to complete complementary academic assignments (Ross & Elechi, 2002; Somerick, 2001), and want opportunities to be challenged in the internship setting (Swift & Kent, 1999). Students engaging in internships expect the experience to be educational and enhance their job-specific skills within a chosen profession (Peretto Stratta, 2004).

In addition to the factors described above (mentorship, education, challenge), the following criteria are used by students to determine satisfaction with the internship experience (Narayanan, Olk & Fukami, 2010; Peretto Stratta, 2004; Rothman, 2007):

- Monetary or in-kind compensation
- Convenience of internship location (i.e., proximity to residence)
- Timing of the internship (e.g., duration, alignment with academic term)
- Exposure and networking opportunities
- Task completion (e.g., successful completion of assigned projects)
- Feedback opportunities

In summary, students seeking internships expect the experience to be educational and to enhance their professional development. In addition to providing hands-on practical experience and skill development, students are interested in learning more about their field of study and networking with practitioners in the field. Despite the potential benefits to be gleaned from the student internship experience, there are often institutional and industrial challenges associated with the delivery of student internship programmes. The following section will discuss the challenges associated with providing high quality internship experiences.

Challenges for Providing Student Internships

Despite the perceived benefits of internships for students and the specific requirements outlined by students for engagement in an internship, there are several challenges associated with providing these experiences. The perceived institutional and industrial challenges are listed below:

- Ensuring effective transfer of student learning from educators to practitioners (Ciofalo, 1992; Kolb, 1984; Tovey, 2001)
- Institutional challenges in obtaining approval of courses (Schmutte, 1986)
- Legal considerations (e.g., contracts, exploitation of interns, safety) (Moorman, 2004)
- Identifying a schedule satisfactory to all parties who are involved in an internship experience (i.e., student, institution, employer) (Schmutte, 1986)
- Cultural differences (e.g., international students) (Sattler, 2011)
- Insufficient funding to carry out internship experiences (Sattler, 2011; Schmutte, 1986)
- Administrative challenges (e.g., paperwork) (Sattler, 2011)
- Difficulty balancing the number of internship opportunities available with the number of students who are interested (Sattler, 2011)
- Lack of interest on behalf of an involved stakeholder (Schmutte, 1986)

As evidenced, there are several institutional and industrial challenges to providing students with high-quality internship experiences. However, considering the educational and professional importance of student internships, it is critical to determine the ways in which these challenges can be resolved.

Summary

In summary, internship experiences are considered to be an integral aspect of the educational and professional development of postsecondary students. Potential benefits of internships include: opportunities for students to translate knowledge learned in the classroom into practice, increased access by industry to the perspectives of a younger population within companies, and a chance for institutions to develop a strong reputation (Divine et al., 2007; Sattler, 2011; Schmutte, 1986; Thiel & Hartley, 1997). Several criteria have been expressed by students as contributing to a satisfactory internship experience. When asked what they look for in an internship, students have identified a desire for challenging educational and skill-building opportunities, exposure to various areas of expertise and networks in the field, and effective mentorship from an industry professional. Despite the benefits of internships and an understanding of the goals of students as interns, the delivery of student internship programming is not easy and there are several challenges faced by institutions when trying to facilitate student internship experiences. Some of these challenges include ensuring the educational quality of the student internship, legal considerations and scheduling conflicts.

The literature has highlighted the many benefits to be gleaned from the internship experience and factors that are considered by students when applying for internships. It is important to note, however, that this information does not speak to internship quality. One of the major challenges faced in the delivery of internship programs in higher education institutions is assuring high-quality educational experiences. It is therefore critical to examine the current conditions of internships, how these experiences are implemented in higher education institutions, and the ways in which these internships can be enhanced to ensure that all students gain worthwhile educational and developmental experiences.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to create an inventory of Ontario postsecondary student internship programmes. More specifically, this research assessed the definitions, conditions and educational value of current "internship" opportunities facilitated by direct-entry postsecondary education programmes in Ontario colleges and universities. Specific research questions explored are listed below.

a) How are student internship programmes defined?
b) What are the internship prerequisites and conditions?
c) What educational conditions exist within these internships?
d) How may the educational quality of these internship programmes be enhanced?

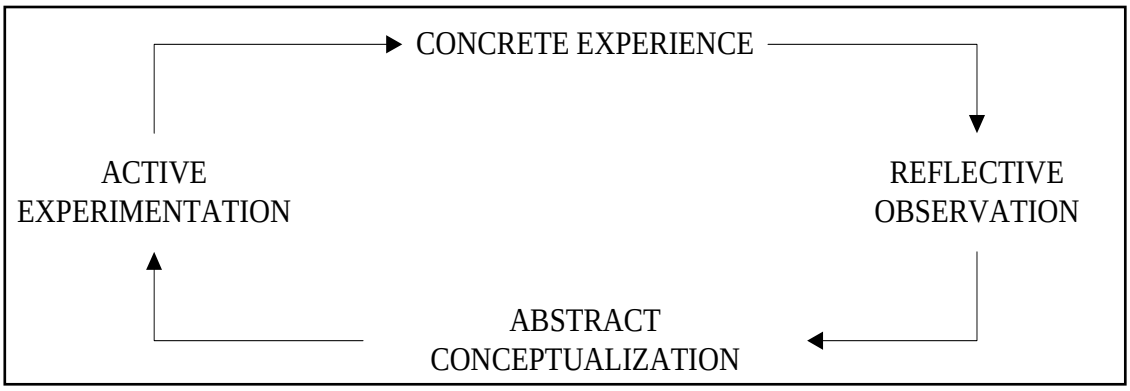
The intent of this research was to use the study findings to identify ways in which the educational quality of student internships may be enhanced to facilitate student leaning and development most effectively.

Theoretical Framework

In order to optimize the educational and developmental benefits gleaned from the student internship experience, it is important that student internship programmes be grounded in empirical learning theory. One learning theory that may be applied to student internship programming is David A. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. This is consistent with Kuh's (2008) use of experiential learning theory in proposing strategies to foster high-impact educational practices in higher education, including high-impact internship and community-based learning experiences. Experiential learning theory is also commonly applied to the facilitation of student life services, which include career services and student internship programmes at colleges and universities across North America.

Kolb's experiential learning theory is frequently cited and invoked by educational practitioners and researchers (Moore, 2010, p. 4) and is widely applied to higher education frameworks and developments (Cantor, 1995; Healey & Jenkins, 2000; Hopkins, 1999; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Kuh, 2008; Lempert, 1996; Priest & Gass, 1997). Kolb used the term "experiential learning" to emphasize the central role that experience plays in the learning process and roots his ideas in the work of Dewey (1938), Lewin (1951) and Piaget (1971). Kolb's experiential learning theory (1981; 1984) describes learning as a four-stage cycle consisting of concrete experience (CE – feeling dimension), reflective observation (RO – reflecting/watching dimension), abstract conceptualization (AC – thinking dimension) and active experimentation (AE – doing dimension). Each stage, also referred to as an adaptation of learning mode, provides the basis for the succeeding learning stage. Learners can enter the cycle at any stage but require the abilities represented by each stage in order for learning to be most effective (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010; Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001).

Figure 1: Kolb's (1984) Cycle of Experiential Learning



One of the defining characteristics of experiential learning theory is the role of purposive experience in learning (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001). A purposive experience involves creating the most effective conditions for learning by linking real-world experience to intended learning objectives and balancing all four learning modes of experience, reflection, conceptualization and experimentation. Done in this way, experiential learning is holistic in nature and focuses on the affective, perceptive, cognitive and behavioral dimensions of the learner. According to Kolb (1984), educational approaches that fail to address each stage in this learning cycle do not facilitate the appropriate conditions for effective learning. This assertion has been supported by other theorists' recognition that experience itself is not necessarily educational.

> If [student] experiences are structured effectively and processed rigorously, they can add a great deal of value to students' learning and to the educational strength of the university… But these transformative effects depend on careful planning and execution, on avoiding the tendency to fall back on the adage that every experience is educational, on pushing students and faculty to think rigorously and extensively about the intersections between theory and instruction, so students can understand not only how to do things, but why they work the way they do, and what ethical principles are at stake as they engage in real-world activity. (Moore, 2010, p. 11)

Consistent with the assertion that not all experiences are conducive to experiential learning, Moore (2010) has criticized the absence of experiential learning theory in higher education experiential activities. More specifically, Moore (2010) poses the critical question: do existing experiential pedagogies realize the potential of experiential learning? In his perspective, common limitations of higher education experiential activities include a lack of emphasis on learning, overemphasis on the practical level in the experience, lack of critical and rigorous reflection, and lack of connection between the experience and curricular learning (Moore, 2010). According to Moore (2010), "Experiential pedagogy, done right, is extremely rewarding – but also extremely demanding" (p. 10).

The application of experiential learning theory to student internships in higher education supports the potential value of student internship programming and the assertion that purposive practice gleaned through students' internship experiences can be highly educational and beneficial to their development. Not only does experiential learning theory support the facilitation of student internship programmes, but application of its key tenets to student internship programming in higher education may help maximize their potential for student learning and development.

Research Design and Methods

In order to address the research questions, a multi-method research design was employed. The study comprised two separate components: a web-based analysis and an analysis of internship programme outlines. Methods of data collection and analysis for each part of the study are reviewed in turn below.

Part 1 – Web-Based Analysis

A web-based analysis was conducted of all work-integrated learning opportunities currently posted online that were labeled as "internships" and were facilitated for students by direct-entry postsecondary education programmes in Ontario colleges and universities. Data collection began by searching the available student internship opportunities in direct-entry postsecondary programmes facilitated through the 20 provincially funded universities and 24 provincially funded colleges in Ontario. For the purpose of this research, data were recorded regarding all available opportunities that were labeled as an "internship." This search did not include other student work-integrated learning opportunities that were not specifically identified as an "internship", such as service learning courses, placements, practicums, co-operative experiences, etc.

In total, 369 internship programmes were identified. For each student internship programme identified on an institutional web page, the organization, internship prerequisites and conditions, intended outcomes, educational conditions, and contact information for the programme administrator were recorded. This information was analyzed inductively by a team of six researchers and the content was organized into summary tables. The final step in this phase of research was to run a descriptive analysis of the content described in the tables to summarize the findings.

The internet is critical to universities and colleges for establishing a strong representation to the public through the communication of information about the institution's values, goals and unique characteristics. Informed by the literature, the first phase of data collection for this study was a web-based analysis of college and university websites. Krippendorff (2012, p. 1) defines content analysis as "an empirically grounded method, exploratory in process, and predictive or inferential in intent." The objective of web-based analyses includes an opportunity to describe the characteristics of web page content and evaluate the effectiveness of communicating this content (McMillan, 2000). As outlined by Krippendorff (1980), the accessible nature and ability to gather high volumes of data ensure that web-based analyses are valuable methods for data collection. It is important to note that web-based analysis relies on the assumption that each institution does indeed update its website with the specific details for each programme. As a result of the focus being placed strictly on student internship programmes mentioned online, this study may have overlooked other internship opportunities offered at universities and colleges that were not detailed online. Further, it should be emphasized that the findings reported in this study reflect the way that institutions are presenting their internship programmes online, which may or may not vary to some degree from practical execution.

Part 2 – Analysis of Internship Programme Outlines

Programme outlines of the postsecondary student internship programmes identified online were collected to supplement the web-based analysis. As previously mentioned, contact information for the administrators of each internship programme was recorded. A contact person was identified for 167 internship programmes. This contact list is shorter than the total number of internship programmes identified as some internship programmes did not provide contact information online. E-mails were distributed to each administrator on an individual basis and follow up e-mails were sent one week apart for three consecutive weeks. The e-mail requested that all administrators provide a course and/or programme outline for the student internship programme in question. In total, 77 outlines were collected. A content analysis was conducted of all programme outlines looking specifically at the intended learning outcomes of each internship programme and the educational components included (e.g., required course assignments, on-site expectations, presentations, etc.). Using Kolb's experiential learning theory, the educational components identified were coded deductively and were categorized into the four educational conditions of concrete experience (practice), reflective observation (reflection), abstract conceptualization (connection to classroom learning) and active experimentation (experimentation).

Overall, two phases of data collection were employed in this study. This included a web-based content analysis of internship opportunities shared by institutions online, as well as a content analysis of the individual programme outlines provided by the administrators of the internship programmes. The results of the data collection and analysis are reported in the following section.

Results – Part 1

A web-based search was performed on the websites of 44 Ontario postsecondary institutions to identify internship opportunities available to students. The purpose of this search was to identify and record all work-integrated learning opportunities currently posted online that were labeled as “internships” and facilitated for students by direct-entry postsecondary education programmes in Ontario colleges and universities. This web search yielded a total of 369 internship programmes: 152 college internship programmes and 217 university internship programmes.

Excluded from this total number were programmes offered at the graduate level, internships advertised through college and/or university websites but facilitated through an external organization, as well as internship-like work-integrated learning opportunities that were titled anything other than “internship.” We recorded a number of internship programmes that did not fit the criteria of our web search for one or more of the above reasons and as such these programmes were not included in the analysis. Some internship programmes were advertised through a college or university web page but were organized and available through an external organization. For example, the “Internship Opportunities” section of Algoma University’s web page included a link to “Government of Ontario internships” that redirected visitors to the Ontario government’s web page. This internship opportunity, although available to postsecondary students, was facilitated through the Ontario government and not through Algoma University and therefore did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the study.

In addition, programmes that had similar descriptions to internship programmes but were titled differently were not represented in the data. For example, work-integrated learning programmes that were labeled as apprenticeships, work placements, co-operative education programmes, field placements or practicums were not included.

Based on the analysis of data yielded from the web search, findings are presented under three main headings: 1) Programme characteristics; 2) Prerequisites of the internship; and 3) Internship conditions. A summary of the overall data from the web-based analyses is provided in Appendix A. Each category is discussed in turn below.

Programme Characteristics

Institution Characteristics

Of the 369 internship programmes recorded, we documented general information from the web regarding institution demographics, field of study offering the internship programme, and internship-specific demographics.

A list of the institutions included in this investigation is provided in Table 1. Of the 44 institutions examined, Ontario colleges represented 41.2% of total internship programmes recorded. Ontario universities accounted for 58.5% of total internship programmes recorded.

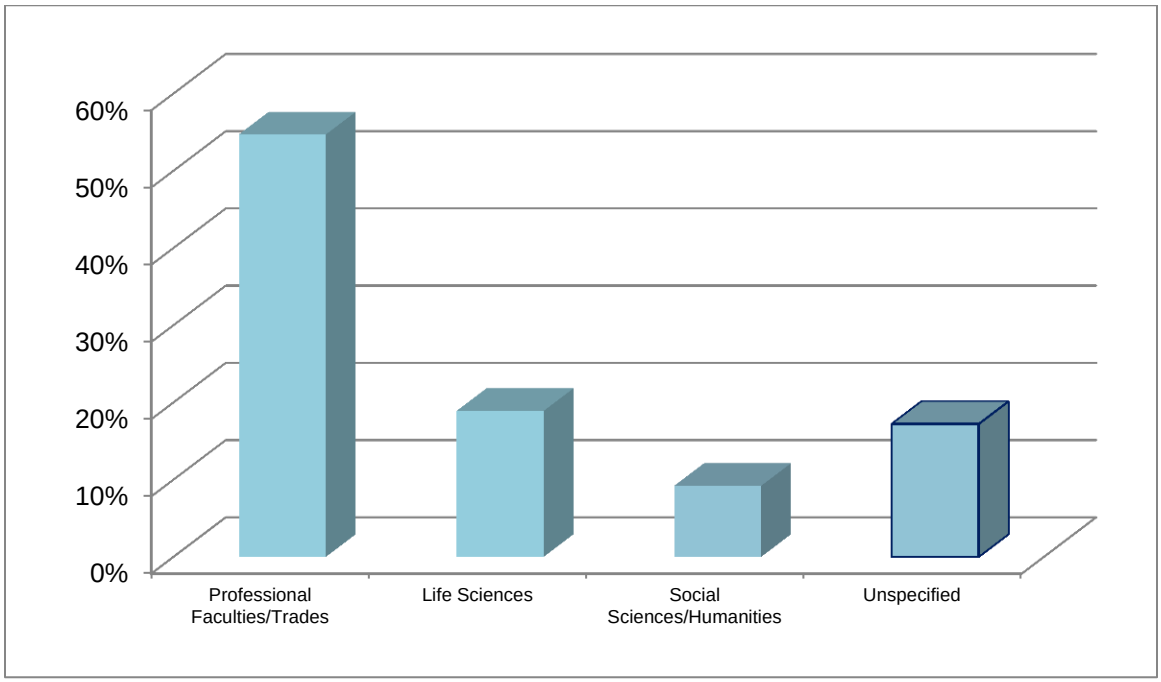
Table 1: List of Institutions Included in the Research

Colleges (24 total)		Universities (20 total)	
Algonquin College	Humber College	Algoma University	Trent University
Cambrian College	La Cité collégiale	Brock University	University of Guelph
Canadore College	Lambton College	Carleton University	University of Ottawa
Centennial College	Loyalist College	Lakehead University	University of Toronto
Collège Boréal	Mohawk College	Laurentian University	University of Waterloo
Conestoga College	Niagara College	McMaster University	University of Windsor
Confederation College	Northern College	Nipissing University	UOIT
Durham College	Sault College	OCADU	Western University
Fanshawe College	Seneca College	Queen's University	Wilfrid Laurier University
Fleming College	Sheridan College	Ryerson University	York University
George Brown College	St. Clair College		
Georgian College	St. Lawrence College		

Field of Study

Of the total number of internships recorded (n=369), 306 specified the field of study that was offering the internship programme, as determined by the college or university facilitating the programme and/or the required major of the student. Internship programmes were listed as belonging to one of the following fields of study: professional faculties/trades, life sciences, or social sciences/humanities. Professional faculties/trades accounted for 54.7% of the sample (n=202). Examples of disciplines making up the professional faculties/trades category and reflected in our sample included business, engineering, kinesiology, applied and professional studies, information and media studies, and music. Internships in the life sciences, which constituted 18.9% (n=70) of the sample, included disciplines such as biology, earth science, health science, forensic science, astronomy, physics, actuarial science and computer science. Lastly, the social sciences/humanities category accounted for 9.2% (n=34) of internship programmes, in fields of study such as geography, social science, social work, political studies, international studies, anthropology, global studies, medieval studies, classical studies, film studies and visual arts. The remaining 17.1% (n=63) of the internship programmes did not explicitly specify the field of study in which the internship was being offered. Figure 2 illustrates these findings.

Figure 2: Internships – Field of Study



Internship Characteristics

Within the data was information detailing various features of the internship programmes. Of the 369 internship programmes recorded, 2.2% (n=8) of programmes specified the year in which they were established, which ranged anywhere from one year to over 40 years ago; 45.0% (n=166) of internship programmes specified that they were offered as course credit (i.e., that students would receive a course credit for completing the internship programme); 7.6% (n=28) of programmes specified they were not offered as course credit; 13.6% (n=50) were optional for students and 13.8% (n=51) were required for graduation. Student enrolment in a specific degree programme was also a criterion for 57.5% (n=212) of internship programmes. In addition, 17.1% (n=63) of programmes required the student to enroll in academic courses while simultaneously participating in the internship; 12.5% (n=46) required the student to organize and set up their internship experience themselves; 1.1% (n=4) of programmes awarded the student a certificate of achievement and 6.5% (n= 24) provided the student with a notation on their transcript upon successful completion of the internship programme. The data also revealed that 1.1% (n=4) of internship programmes were required for a professional designation (e.g., with the Ontario Board of Funeral Services, Music Therapist Accredited – MTA, Certified Management Accountant – CMA, and/or Association of Registered Graphic Designers of Ontario). Lastly, of those internships identified in the web search, 24.4% (n=90) specified that the programme was available in a regional location close to the institution and 8.7% (n=32) specified that the internship could be completed at another site within Canada or at an international location (e.g., USA, China, Taiwan, Australia, Turkey, England, Scotland, Bangladesh, Kenya, New Zealand, Mexico, Brazil or Greece). As a reminder, this research does not identify every characteristic of every internship programs offered by an Ontario higher education institution; rather, these findings note the sorts of information that institutions find to be worthy of mention about the opportunities that they do offer.

Key Findings

Through the web page analysis, other work-integrated learning opportunities described in terms similar to those used for internships were identified. This is interesting to note as it highlights the lack of a clear definition of an internship as well as the lack of distinction, in practice, between different kinds of work-integrated learning opportunities. A number of internship programmes that we identified were not facilitated by the higher education institution. This raises the question of who should take responsibility for assuring the educational quality of student internships, especially if some internship programmes being advertised on Ontario college and university web pages are actually run by a third-party organization. Furthermore, while Ontario colleges and universities both offer numerous internship programmes, the term "internship" seems to be most popular in university settings and in professional faculties and trades. There are subtleties in the characteristics of the internship programmes that make them distinct from each other, such as requirement for graduation and/or professional designation, providing notation on the student(s) transcript(s), and geographic location of the internship. In most cases, we were not able to identify the specific definition of "internship" being employed by each of the programmes in advertising their product. Instead, "internship" was often defined in terms of the prerequisites and conditions required for participation.

The next category will provide further information about the prerequisite information required by internship programmes.

Internship Prerequisites

Academic Prerequisites

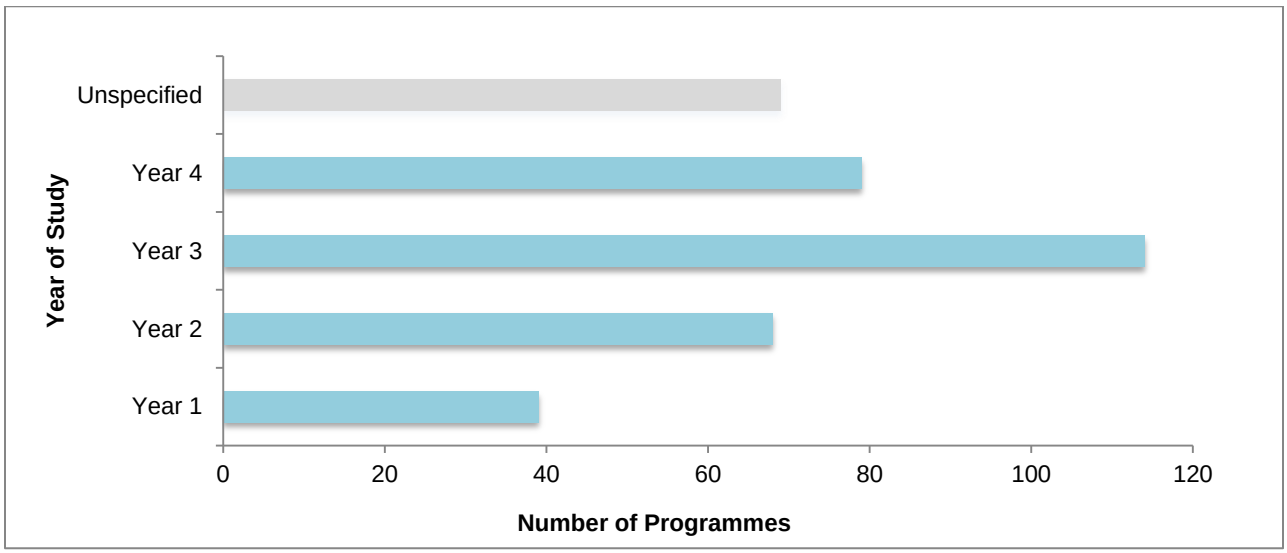
To be eligible to participate in an internship programme, 31.2% (n=115) of internships required the student to complete pre/corequisite courses prior to enrolment. In addition, 3.5% (n=13) of programmes required that the student achieve a specified grade percentage in those pre/corequisite courses. 4.6% (n=17) of programmes also specified that the student(s) be on the honour roll to be eligible for participation in the internship, while 18.7% (n=69) specified a minimum grade point average (GPA) for participation. Lastly, being a full-time student was specified as a criterion by 21.7% (n=80) of internship programmes, whereas 0% (n=0) specified that being a part-time student was a criterion for internship participation.

Year of Study

81.3% of internship programmes (n= 300) required that the student applying to the internship be enrolled at the institution facilitating the internship in a particular year of study. Of the total number of internship programmes documented, 10.6% (n=39) required the applying student(s) to be first-year students; 18.4% (n=68) required the student(s) to be second-year students; 30.9% (n=114) required the student(s) to be third-year students; and 21.4% (n=79) required the student(s) to be fourth-year students. The remaining 18.7% (n=69) of programmes did not specify a particular year of study for participation.

Figure 3 illustrates this information.

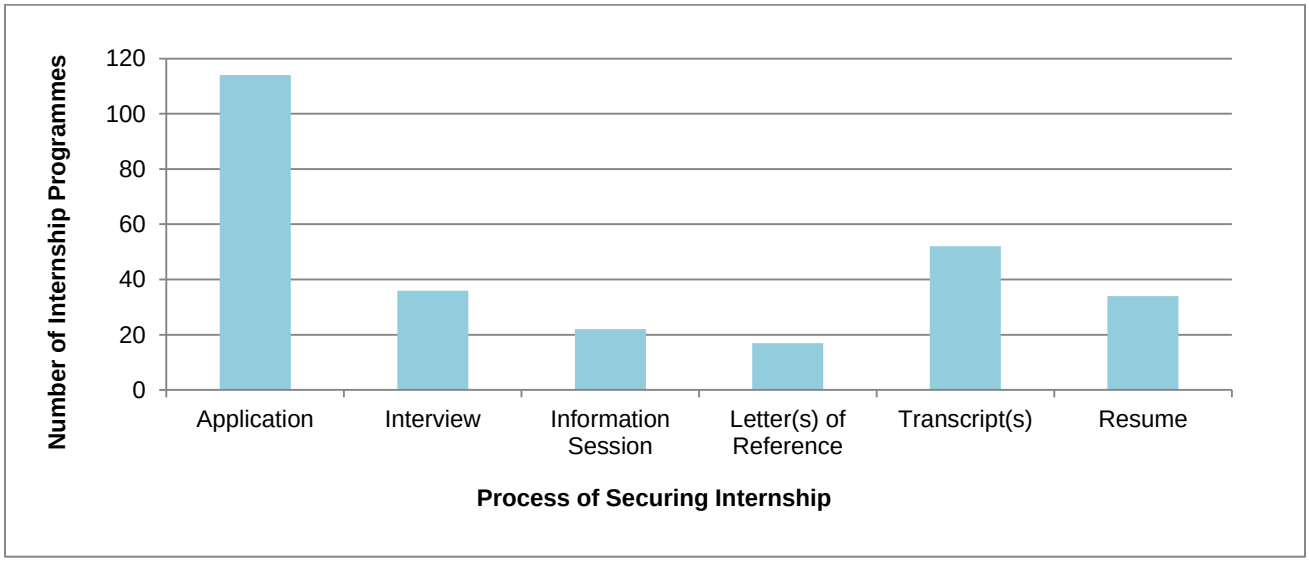
Figure 3: Student Year of Study



Process of Securing the Internship

When we considered data about the process by which students secure placement in an internship programme, we found that 30.9% of internships required an application (n=114), 9.8% involved an interview process (n=36), 6.0% required attendance at mandatory information sessions (n=22), 4.6% required letter(s) of reference (n=17), 14.1% required transcript(s) (n=52), and 9.2% required submitting a resume (n=34). Figure 4 below displays these findings.

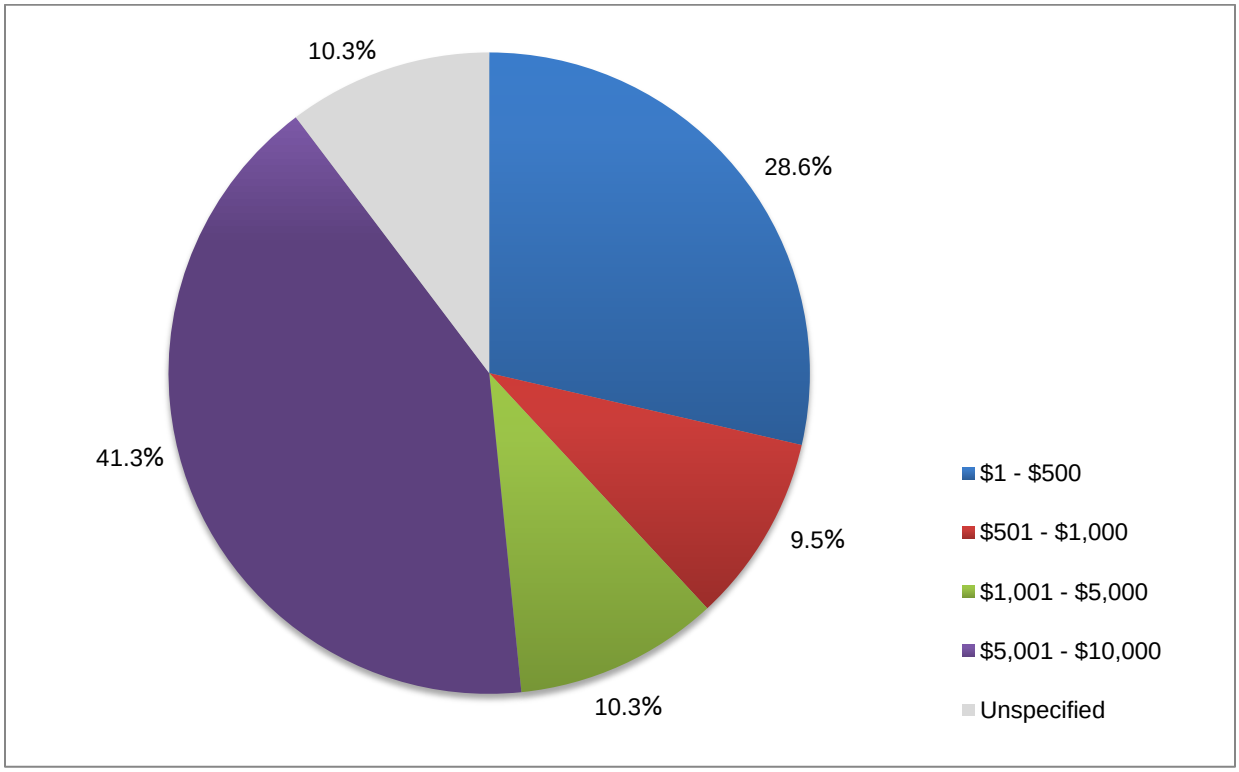
Figure 4: How is the Internship Secured?



Fees

Data revealed that 34.1% (n=126) of internships required the student to pay fees to participate in the programmes. Of those internship programmes that required the payment of fees, 28.6% required the student pay $1-$500 (n=36); 9.5% of programmes required the student pay $501-$1,000 (n=12); 10.3% required the student pay $1,001-$5,000 (n=13); 41.3% required the student pay $5,001-$10,000 (n=52); and 10.3% of programmes did not specify a dollar amount (n=13). In the majority of cases it was not specified whether or not the fee was an ancillary fee (i.e., a fee charged in addition to student tuition) or if the cost of student tuition was included in the fee requirement. With this in mind, the high fee requirements (i.e., >$1,000) presumably reflect the tuition costs required to be enrolled in the internship credit-bearing course. In some areas of study where there was an ancillary fee (exclusive of tuition costs), particularly business and engineering, this often coincided with a break from academic studies and high financial compensation for the work performed as a student intern. See Figure 5 below for an illustration of these findings.

Figure 5: Fees Associated with Participating in an Internship



In addition, data regarding the citizenship and required experiences of the student were recorded. Of those internship programmes that specified citizenship requirements (n=246), 33.3% (n=123) of internship programmes were available to Canadian citizens and 33.3% (n=123) of internship programmes were open to international students. The proficiency of the student in English and/or French was also specified as a prerequisite by 3.0% (n=11) of internship programmes. Lastly, 9.5% (n=35) of internship programmes specified that the student could only enroll in any individual programme once, whereas 2.2% (n=8) of internship programme specified the student(s) could enroll in any individual programme multiple times.

Key Findings

The variety of prerequisites specified by internship programmes is interesting because it shows the inconsistency and variation of Ontario postsecondary internship opportunities. More specifically, these data illustrate that each internship programme is unique and that there appears to be no set standard regarding the prerequisites required to participate in an Ontario postsecondary internship programme. Information on academic prerequisites, year of study, enrolment process, as well as associated internship fees highlight the variability we see across internship programmes.

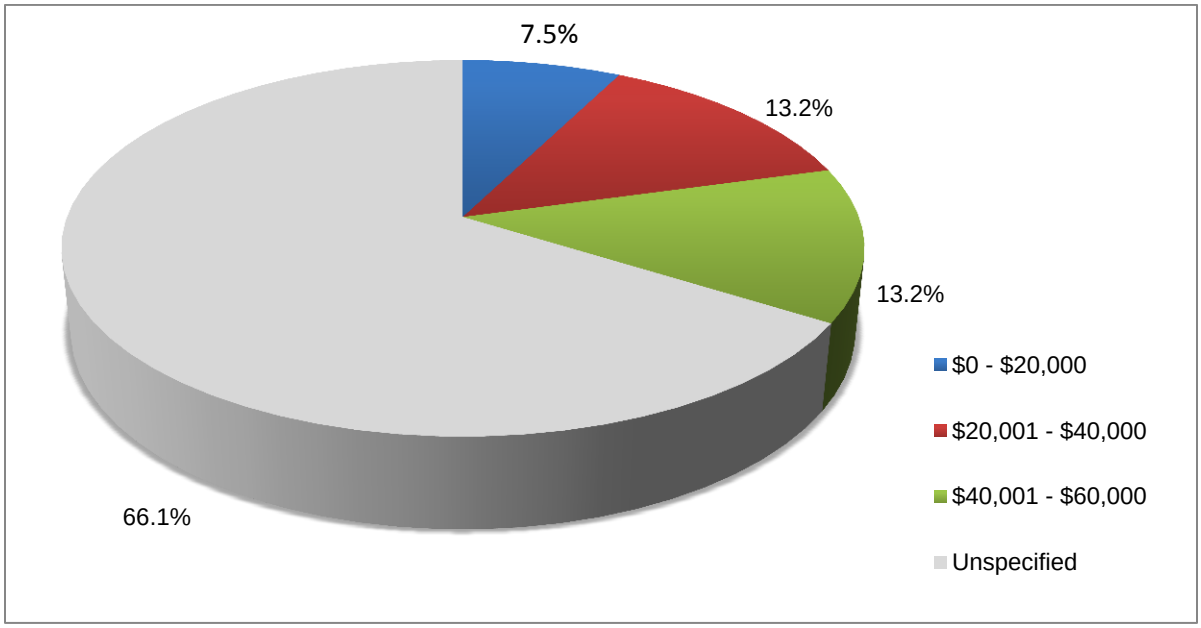
The variation in the parametres of Ontario postsecondary internship programmes is further highlighted in the next section, which discusses the specific conditions of the internship programmes.

Internship Conditions

Compensation

One noteworthy characteristic of internship programmes was the compensation offered to students for their participation. From the total number of internships recorded, 14.4% (n=53) specified that they were paid internships, 24.4% (n=75) specified that they were unpaid internships, and 61.2% (n=226) provided no details concerning compensation. Of the paid internships, 7.5% (n=4) offered compensation between $0-$20,000, 13.2% (n=7) offered compensation between $20,001-$40,000, 13.2% (n=7) offered compensation between $40,001-$60,000, and 66.1% (n=35) did not specify an amount for compensation. In general, higher levels of compensation (>$20,000) were most often seen in internship programme descriptions from professional faculties and trades such as business and engineering and required full-time commitment and a period of time away from academic studies (e.g., professional experience year). Figure 6 illustrates these findings.

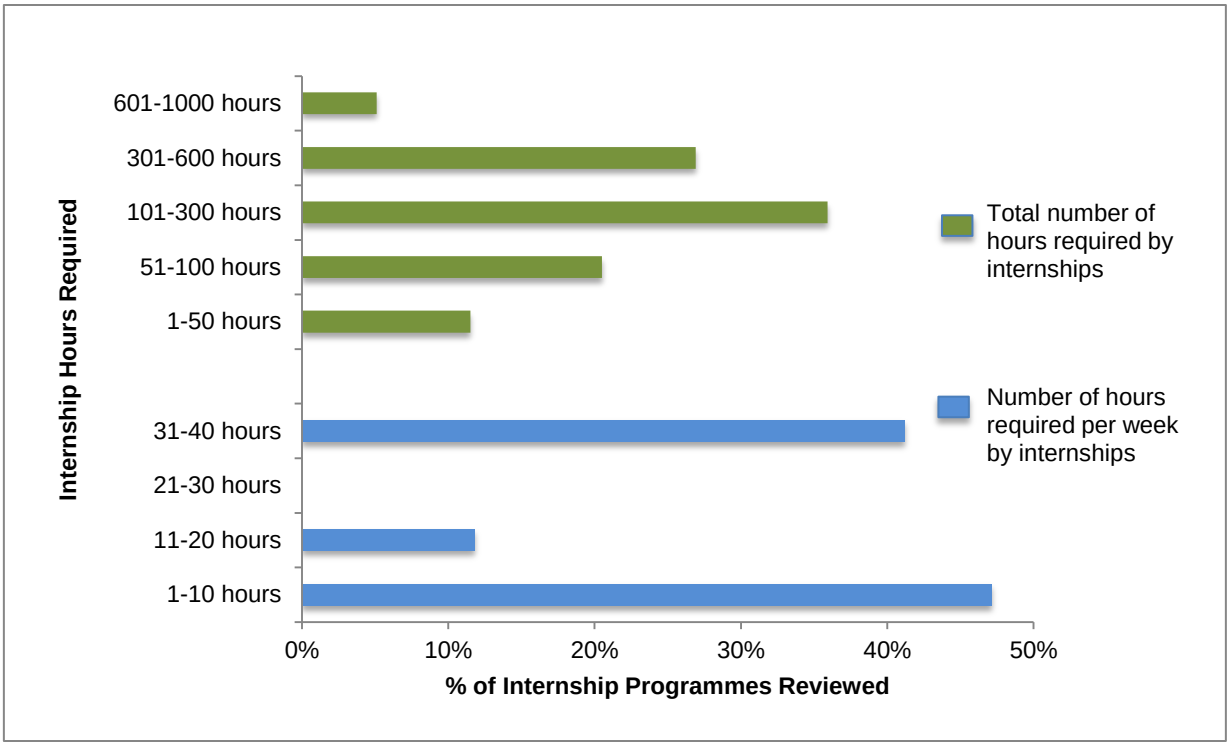
Figure 6: Salaries for Paid Internships



Internship Requirements

Internship programmes commonly outlined the number of hours required of the student to complete the internship. Of the 369 internship programmes recorded, 25.7% (n=24) specified the number of hours to be completed in the programme and 74.3% (n=76) did not specify. When specified, the number of hours was listed either using the total number of hours to be completed by the student(s) (n=78) or the number of hours per week required by the internship (n=17). When considering internship programme requirements in terms of total hours, 11.5% of internship programmes required 1-50 hours (n=9); 20.5% of internship programmes required 51-100 hours (n=16); 35.9% of internship programmes required 101-300 hours (n=28); 26.9% of internship programmes required 301-600 hours (n=21); and 5.1% of internship programmes required 601-1,000 hours (n=4). When considering internship programme requirements in terms of hours to be completed per week, 47.1% of internship programmes required 1-10 hours per week (n=8); 11.8% of internship programmes required 11-20 hours per week (n=2); 0% of internships required 21-30 hours per week (n=0); and 41.2% of internship programmes required 31-40 hours per week (n=7). This information is outlined in Figure 7.

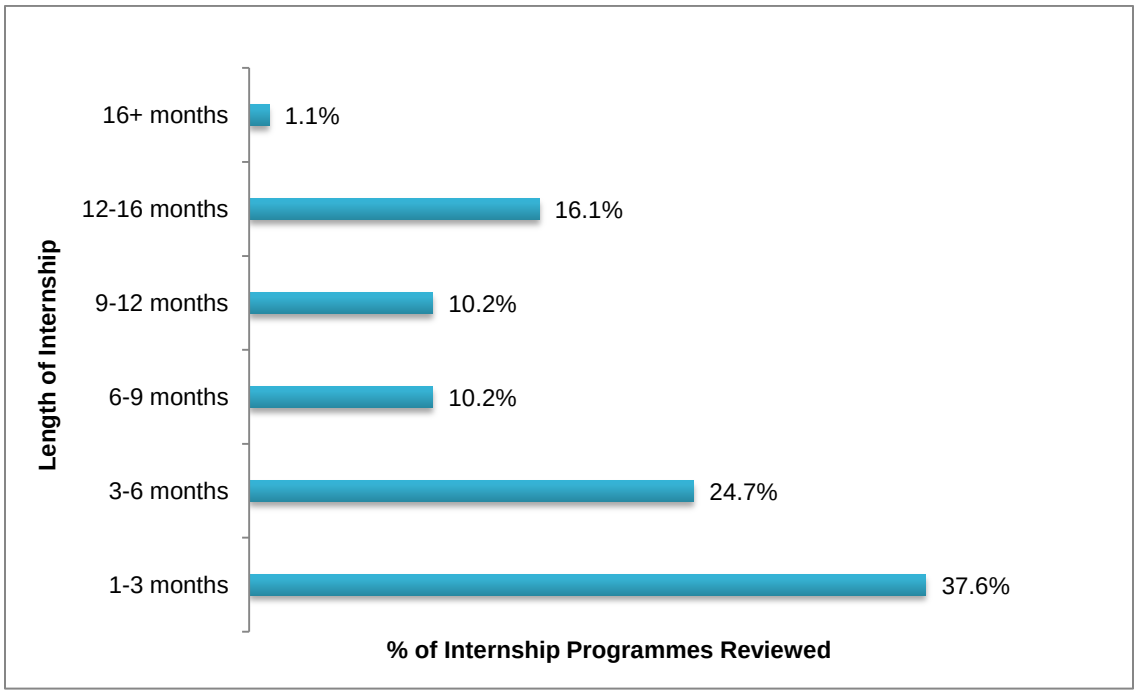
Figure 7: Number of Internship Hours Required



Similarly, 50.4% of programmes reported the length of the internship, while 49.6% did not specify. Of the programmes that specified the length of the internship, 37.6% required 1-3 months (n=70); 24.7% required 3-6 months (n=46); 10.2% required 6-9 months (n=19); 10.2% required 9-12 months (n=19); 16.1% required 12-16 months (n=30); and 1.1% required 16 months+ (n=2). This information is illustrated in Figure 8.

Additional requirements specified by the internships stated that 7.6% of programmes have limited enrolment (n=28). For example, programmes specified having a maximum of 2-75 spots available. Obtaining faculty supervision was also an internship requirement of 26.8% of programmes (n=99).

Figure 8: Length of Internship Programmes



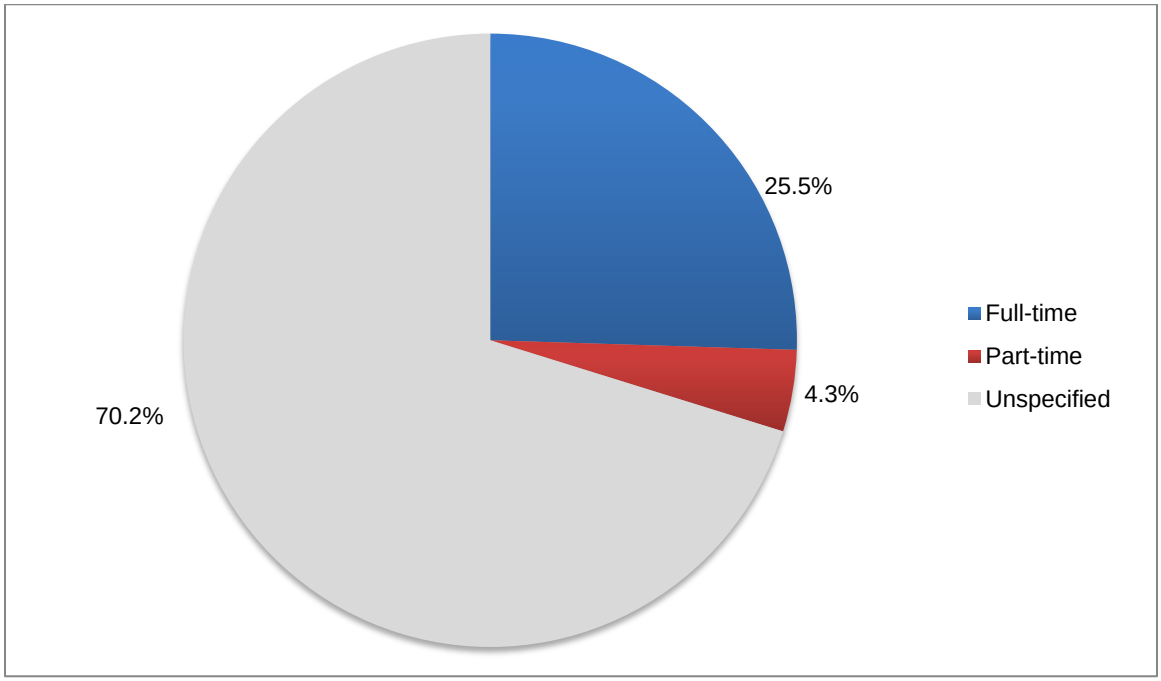
Internship Availability

The web search revealed information on the time of year the internship programmes are offered. Internships offered in the fall term (September-December) accounted for 14.9% of programmes (n=55); internships offered in the winter term (January-April) accounted for 22.8% of programmes (n=84); internships offered in the summer term (May-August) accounted for 16.5% of programmes (n=61); and the remaining 45.8% of internships did not specify a particular time of year (n=169).

Student Commitment

The commitment (part-time or full-time) required of the student throughout the internship programme was specified by 29.8% of programmes (n=110) and was not specified by the remaining 70.2% of programmes (n=259). Of those 29.8% of programmes that specified a time commitment, 25.5% required the student to commit full-time (n=94) and the remaining 4.3% of programmes required only a part-time commitment to the internship (n=16). See Figure 9 for these results.

Figure 9: Internship Time Commitment



Student Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the student occupying the internship were specified in 16% of the internship programmes recorded. Of these internships that specified student responsibilities, 5.1% specified that the student must complete the work required of them (n=19), 5.4% specified that the student must portray a professional attitude towards the internship (n=20), 4.6% specified that the student must demonstrate initiative (n=17), and 0.8% specified that the students must participate in company outreach initiatives and/or social events (n=3), such as participation in annual company social events or community volunteer initiatives.

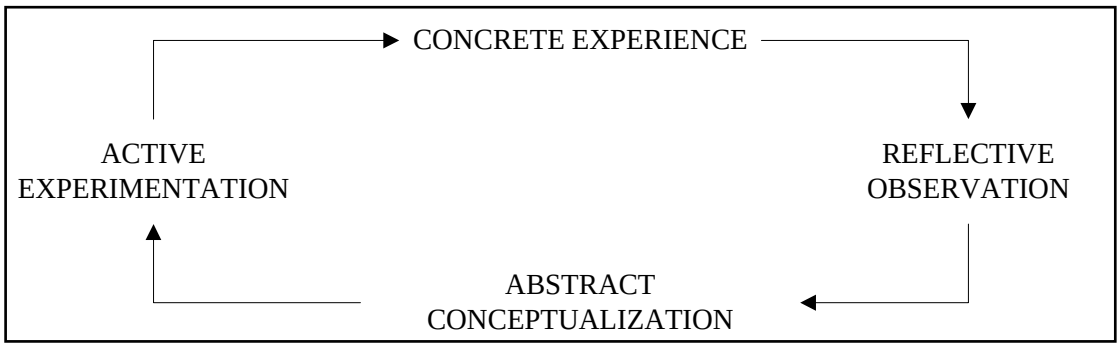
Key Findings

The analysis of the internship programmes that we identified highlights the inconsistent definitions of "internship." In most cases, a specific definition of the internship programme was not articulated; instead, the meaning had to be inferred from descriptions of the internship programme prerequisites and conditions. Some of the most frequently cited internship conditions gleaned from the web analyses included descriptors of the internship, such as compensation, number of hours to be completed, number of months to be completed, time of year of the internship, and time commitment. Together, these descriptors contribute to the emerging finding that postsecondary internship programmes are diverse and that there is significant variation in the stated conditions of the internship itself as well as the stated requirements of the student intern.

Results – Part 2

In addition to the 369 online descriptions, programme outlines were collected for 77 internships programmes. In this phase, the content of the internship course outlines was analyzed according to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. The results are organized according to each of Kolb's four experiential learning modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Figure 10 illustrates Kolb's cycle of experiential learning. The analysis of the programme outlines included identification of intended learning outcomes of each internship programme, the educational components, and best practices of each programme. Within each of Kolb's four learning modes, a definition of the learning mode, examples of best practice and illustrations of its representation in the course outlines reviewed will be provided.

Figure 10: Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning



Concrete Experience

Definition

Concrete experience is the hands-on experience of participating in a new situation. This mode, according to Kolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis (2001), is about grasping experience and perceiving "new information through experiencing the concrete, tangible, felt qualities of the world, relying on our senses and immersing ourselves in concrete reality" (p. 3).

Examples of Best Practice

Reflected in the collected programme outlines are examples of best practice that illustrate the concrete experience classification of Kolb's experiential learning theory, including practical experience, common internship responsibilities and diversity in internship experiences. Each theme, along with its corresponding sub-themes and meaning units, is described below. The representation of the learning mode of concrete experience across the programme outlines is then presented.

Practical Experience

The practical experience theme examined the total number of hours of the internship as well as the distribution of those hours. Programme outlines indicated a range of hours to be completed by the student

over the course of the internship. For example, some programmes required a minimum of 80-350 hours, while other programmes specified a maximum number of hours to be completed by the student while participating in the internship, ranging from 450-600 total hours. In addition to the diversity in total number of internship hours, the distribution of these hours across the internship experience varied. Some programme outlines provided a general distribution of hours, for example, 200 hours to be completed over the course of the academic year or 3-4 months for a total of 450-560 hours. On the other hand, some programme outlines were much more specific, specifying 7-8 hours a day, four days a week for 12 weeks. Other outlines described the distribution of the total number of hours required by their internship; for example, a total of 350 hours was defined by one programme outline as working five days a week for seven hours each day for a total of 10 weeks. A small percentage of the programme outlines went further, pre-determining the specific hours in the day students will work, for example, 35 hours per week, working 9 am to 1 pm Monday through Friday.

Common Internship Responsibilities

Internship responsibilities were represented in the programme outlines through a list of internship tasks/duties and course learning outcomes and/or objectives. The majority of the programme outlines specified that the internship experience must be linked with specific learning outcomes, and the specific learning outcomes or essential knowledge and skills required were frequently linked with broader learning outcomes defined by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, program standards, employers' needs, and/or industry and professional organizations' standards. Some examples include: develop skills in community-based research including the ability to negotiate with community partners and assess their research needs, develop a professional collaborative relationship and convey realistic expectations to research partners; develop professional skills in project management, leadership and collaboration, writing and communication for a range of audiences (academic, community, business); develop skills in critical self-reflection; engage in reflective practice to improve the nature and quality of service provided; collect, analyze and organize relevant information from a variety of sources; interact with others in groups or teams in ways that contribute to effective working relationships and the achievement of goals; evaluate one's own thinking throughout the steps and processes used in problem solving and decision making; and reframe information, ideas and concepts which demonstrate understanding.

Internship responsibilities, as specified by the programme outlines, also included general duties, such as: assisting in the running of the organization/institution; responding to e-mail and fax correspondence; handling telephone enquiries; organizing and publicizing events; and acting as a representative of the institute within the greater community.

Diversity in Internship Experiences

Diversity within the internship experience was represented in the programme outlines. For example, some outlines specified that students may not serve in an organization in which they have worked previously to avoid duplicating an internship experience. Others stated that students may participate in internships for no more than one credit toward their academic degree.

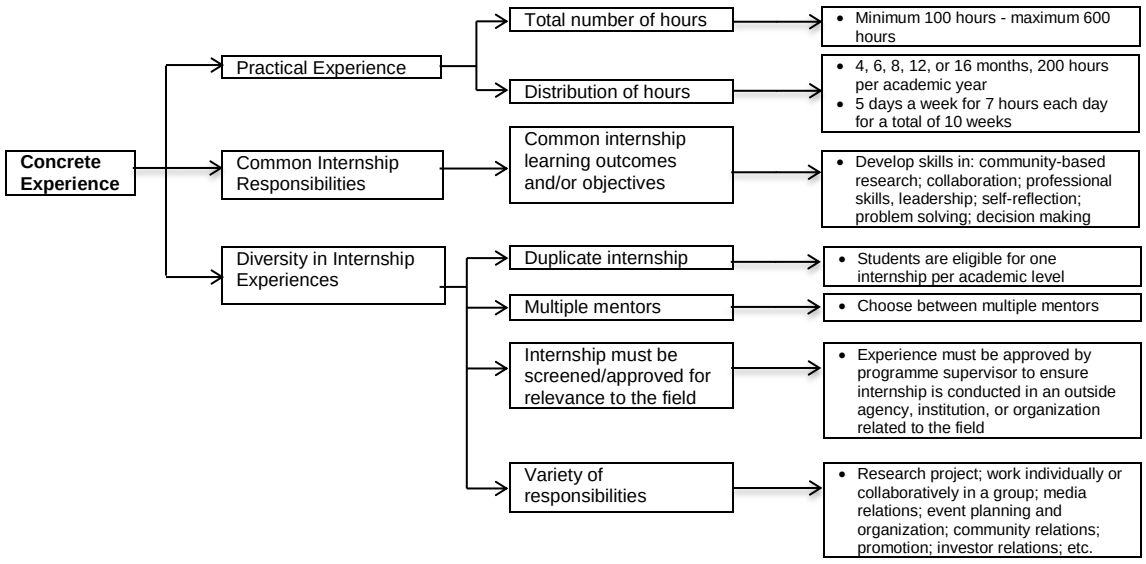
Another example of variation in the internship experience pertained to the student's exposure to mentors. For example, a number of programme outlines specified that the students have the option to choose from multiple mentors available to them, including potential research supervisors. In giving students the autonomy to choose their internship supervisor, programmes ensured the internships' relevance to the field by having them screened and/or approved by internship programme supervisors. For example, one programme outline stated that a student may choose his or her research supervisor for their kinesiology internship, but that the experience must be approved by the programme supervisor to ensure the practical experience and research is conducted in a setting related to the field of kinesiology.

Lastly, programme outlines illustrated varying responsibilities expected of students, which creates great diversity in the internship experiences. For example, one programme outline stated that students might gain experience in areas such as media relations, special event planning and coordination, marketing communications, web design and maintenance, community relations, promotion, donor relations and investor relations. In another example, the programme outline stated that the student may be asked to complete an individual research project; in other cases, it was stated in the programme outline that the student may take on a role within an existing project team. Programme outlines specified that within the responsibilities of the student during the internship experience, each student will have the opportunity to work both individually and collaboratively in a real workplace environment.

Representation of Concrete Experience Activities in Programme Outlines

The concrete experience mode of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory was well represented by the majority of programme outlines collected through the second phase of data collection. This mode is where the tangible elements of the internship are illustrated, for example, the practical hours completed by the student, common internship tasks and responsibilities, as well as components of the internship that make it a diverse experience. The predominance of the concrete experience mode in the outlines is important to highlight because it illustrates an emphasis on the logistical components of the experience. It suggests a common understanding of the importance of including concrete details of a student's hands-on learning within internship programmes across Ontario postsecondary institutions. However, consistent with previous findings from the first phase of the results, there is substantial variation in these details, including, for example, a wide range of required hours to be completed in the internship and large variability regarding students' responsibilities throughout their internship experience. Figure 11 illustrates the concrete experience mode, its themes, sub-themes and corresponding meaning units.

Figure 11: Concrete Experience – Educational Conditions of Ontario Colleges and University Internship Programmes



The next mode, reflective observation, addresses opportunities available for students to observe and reflect upon their internship experiences.

Reflective Observation

Definition

Reflective observation is the ability to take in an experience and reflect back on it. It is the transformation or processing of experience from watching others who are involved in the experience and reflecting on what happens (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001).

Examples of Best Practice

Illustrations of best practice with respect to the reflective observation mode include examples such as mentor shadowing, training and orientation, reflective writing and reflective discussion. Each theme along with its corresponding sub-themes and meaning units is described below. The representation of the learning mode of reflective observation across the programme outlines is then presented.

Mentor Shadowing

Programme outlines specified that interns must be paired with a specific team or area of their internship organization and/or institution. For example, one programme outline stated that a student participating in an internship in the medical field must successfully complete his or her hours in a hospital setting shadowing a physician. Programme outlines also specified that internship activities must be supervised. For example, research or lab-based internships must have a faculty supervisor who oversees the work or that students should have an industry professional as their mentor. Internship supervision could be provided by a faculty member, clinic instructor, or professional practitioner.

Training and Orientation

Training and orientation for an internship was described through the programme outlines as consisting of activities, workshops, or training that needs to be done prior to the internship or ongoing training that occurs throughout a student's internship. Examples of preparation prior to students' engagement in an internship included: library tour, research ethics seminar, general health and safety training, lab safety seminar, resume and cover letting writing workshop, and interview skills workshop. Attendance at these activities prior to a student's participation in an internship was, for the most part, mandatory. Examples of ongoing training for students during the internship experience included: conferences, company workshops/lectures/seminars, completion of an online course, participation in a discussion group, field-specific learning activities, leading a workshop or seminar, and weekly meetings with the internship team and/or supervisor.

Reflective Writing

Reflective writing assignments, through a variety of formats, were well-represented in the programme outlines. Examples of reflective writing cited in the programme outlines included final reports, midterm reports, journals, reflections and blogs.

The most commonly cited form of reflective writing was the student's completion of a final report. This required that the student complete a paper that included some of the following: descriptions of student

learning objectives (e.g., what did you want to gain from the internship experience? Discuss how these objectives were or were not met – e.g., what skills did you learn?); list of the tasks/duties the student carried out each day of the internship; and a discussion of the student's suggestions to improve the internship experience for future students. In some case the students were also asked to use concrete examples and link their learning journals with theory previously learned in the classroom. The expected length of a final report varied, but typically was expected to be no more than 3,500 words.

Midterm reports were often a form of course assessment and required the student to include specific information in the report. For example, the report must discuss information about the profession or practice in which the student was working; a description of challenges (personal or professional) faced and how they were resolved; how the goals and objectives that were initially described have evolved.

Journals were used as opportunities for students to record the progress of their work placement and to relate to that experience. In many cases, students were required to keep daily journals documenting their work experiences and reflections on these experiences. Journals were meant to be a vehicle through which students analyze their internship experiences critically and reflect on the learning objectives and personal, professional, or academic growth. Programme outlines described assessment of the journals on the basis of completeness, degree of detail, the professionalism evident in the language used, and the recognition of the significance of the student's experiences as they related to programme content and personal career goals.

The reflective writing component facilitated students' abilities to draw meaning from their experiences and provided evidence of their personal and professional growth. Reflective papers allowed students to reflect on the learning objectives they set out for themselves, requiring a critical review of learning objectives, recommendations for revisions, and how their internship experience may be enriched.

Lastly, reflective writing through blogs was, in some outlines, illustrated through requirements such as: blogging; participation on discussion boards; and keeping work logs.

Reflective Discussion

Representations of reflective discussion were also well documented in the programme outlines. Examples of reflective discussion included: final presentations, ongoing feedback meetings, exit interviews with internship mentor, class/tutorial discussions, and exit interviews with internship coordinator. Commonly, final presentations were oral presentations given by the student intern that cover background information on the internship experience, skills learned, evaluation of the internship and recommendations for future students. Presentations were made to faculty/staff, internship supervisors, undergraduate students and/or workplace professionals.

Another opportunity for reflective discussion was provided through ongoing feedback meetings students have with their internship employer, supervisor, coordinator, mentor, or faculty/staff member. These meetings were intended to provide student interns with feedback and an assessment of their progress through the internship. Site visits, weekly/monthly meetings and/or telephone/email check-ins were common methods used to facilitate ongoing feedback meetings, which also served as opportunities for students to discuss the details of their work or any issues of concern with the internship supervisor.

Exit interviews with the mentor were described as an opportunity for students to meet with their mentor to discuss their internship experience and the mentor's evaluation of the student's performance. Exit interviews involved discussion of a student's performance, including such areas as: ability to learn, written communication skills, listening and oral communication skills, creative thinking and problem solving, interpersonal and teamwork skills, professional and career development skills, basic work habits and

character attributes. Final evaluations were a very common form of student intern assessment and were completed by the internship mentor and submitted to the internship coordinator for inclusion in the internship course grade.

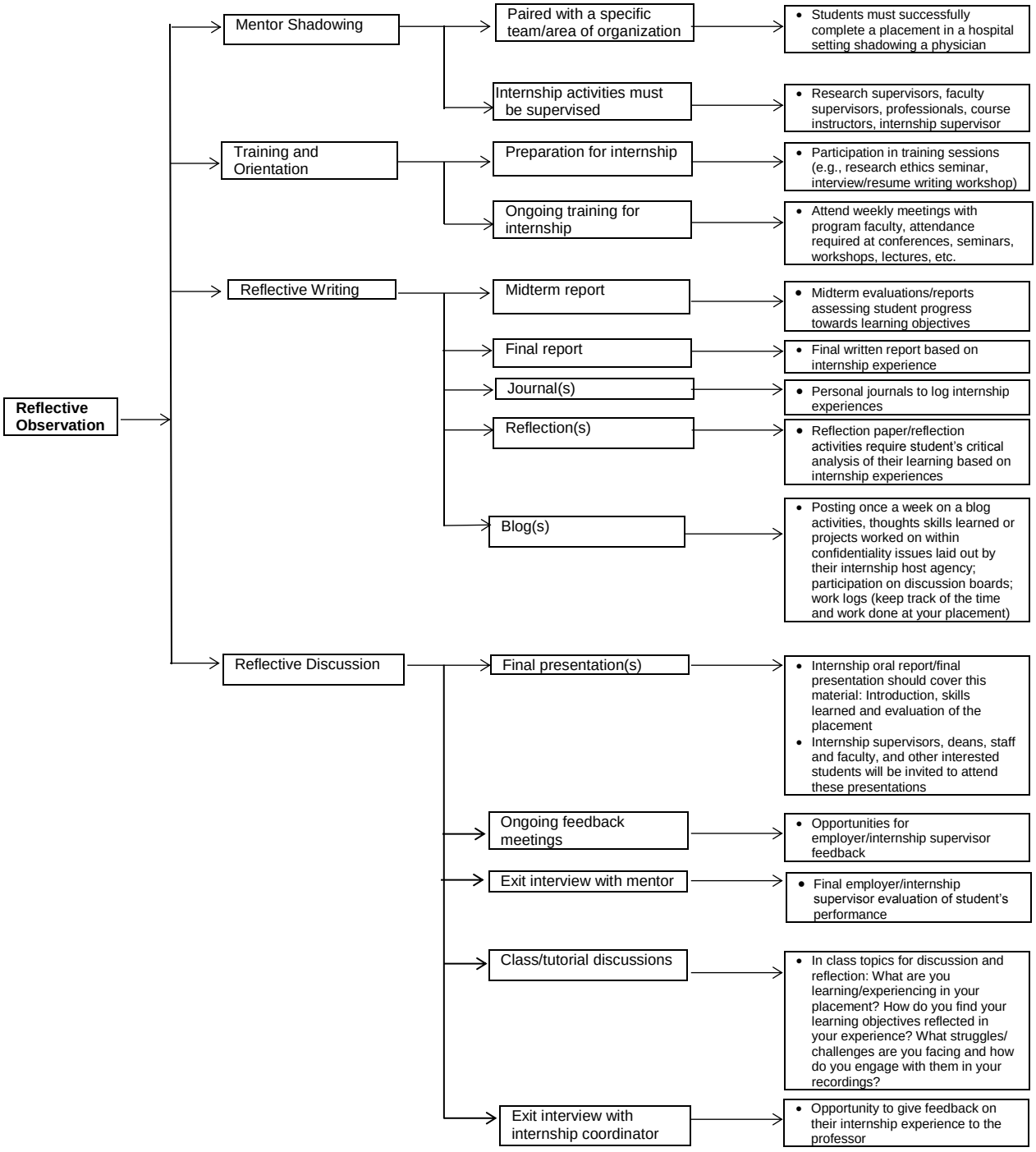
Class and/or tutorial discussions were described as opportunities for students to suggest topics for discussion based on their internship experiences. Examples of questions and topics covered in class or tutorial discussions included: What are you learning/experiencing in your placement? How do you find your learning objectives reflected in your experience? What struggles/challenges are you facing? What is your next plan of action? What do you hope to accomplish/gain? What have you learned from the dynamics of the organization? These discussions were facilitated in person, via blackboard, or through online discussion posts.

The exit interview with the course coordinator or internship coordinator/facilitator was represented in the programme outlines as providing students with opportunities to give feedback on their internship experience. Exit interviews with the course coordinator, although documented in some of the programme outlines, were less common than exit interviews with the internship mentor/supervisor.

Representation of Reflective Observation Activities in Programme Outlines

This mode was very well represented in the programme outlines collected. Opportunities for training and orientation, reflective writing assignments and reflective discussion represented a variety of means through which students could demonstrate abilities to reflect on their experiences. Reflective assignments were commonly used and support the reflective observation mode and the integration of academic responsibilities within practical experience. Participation in tutorial discussions, feedback meetings and final presentations were commonly cited oral assessments. Consistent with the results from Phase 1 is the finding of significant variation in the ways in which reflective observation is demonstrated. Together, all of these findings contribute to an emerging trend that internships differ in their representation, opportunities for and evaluation of the reflective observation mode. These findings are illustrated in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Reflective Observation – Educational Conditions of Ontario Colleges and University Internship Programmes



The next mode that will be explored is abstract conceptualization, which highlights those opportunities for students to integrate their internship experiences with theory.

Abstract Conceptualization

Definition

Abstract conceptualization is the ability to take experience and relate it to overarching theory or to create new ideas from it. According to Kolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis (2001), this mode is represented by individuals who perceive, grasp, or take hold of new information through symbolic representation or abstract conceptualization – thinking about, analyzing, or systematically planning, rather than using sensation as a guide (p. 3).

Examples of Best Practice

The following themes represent examples of best practice within the abstract conceptualization mode: intersection with internship and class work, common learning outcomes and/or objectives, connection with previous courses and/or learning, and idea generation. Each theme is described below, along with its corresponding sub-themes and meaning units. The representation of the learning mode of abstract conceptualization across the programme outlines is then presented.

Intersection with Internship and Class Work

The intersection with the internship experience and class work was represented through three different models: integrated model, distinct model and mixed model. The integrated model was exemplified when the internship experience happened at the same time and was integrated into academic course content. For example, one programme outline specified that the course combined scholarly knowledge of social movements with the hands-on experience of working with a community organization and included 33 hours of class instruction and 32 hours of internship experience/practical experience. This model was proposed to help students link knowledge to the hands-on experience of an internship.

The distinct model occurs when the internship experience happens separately from academic courses. This model allows the student intern to commit fully to the internship and have the student's sole obligation be to the place of employment and to the supervisor/mentor. This model, for example, required the student to complete a typical four-year degree in five years, with a one-year hiatus from academic courses to participate in an internship experience.

The mixed model sees the internship experience occurring at the same time as academic courses/lectures/tutorials/workshops/etc., but they occur independently of each other. For example, while the student interns complete their internship hours, they are required to attend four seminars and six class meetings throughout the academic year that involve discussion of general topics regarding internships, but are not field-specific. This model allows the student to dedicate his or her time and energy to the internship experience, while sporadically mixing in academic requirements.

Common Learning Outcomes and/or Objectives

Stated learning outcomes and/or objectives in the programme outlines included generalizable professional skill development and career-specific skill development. Some examples of learning outcomes and/or objectives that target general skill development included the learning of: how to set up and conduct informational interviews; how to prepare for and successfully navigate a formal job interview; how to write a

resume and cover letter (learning the customization requirements); how to prepare for a mock interview; and how to build a LinkedIn profile and establish an "online presence." On the other hand, an example of a learning outcome and/or objective from a *Current Turf Practices* course programme outline that targets the development of career specific skills stated: students will be able to identify basic weather patterns and classify weather data sources. Programme outlines represented general and career-specific skill development learning outcomes and/or objectives fairy equally.

Connection with Previous Courses and/or Learning

The ability of a student to critique an internship experience in light of previous curricular learning illustrated a connection with previous courses and/or learning. The most commonly reported example was prerequisite course requirements in order for a student to be eligible to participate in the internship. For example, one programme outline stated that students enrolled in the ECN internship course must be enrolled in ECN 627 and should have completed ECN 627 prior to the commencement of the internship position. Prerequisite course requirements provide evidence to support the idea that students are encouraged to have some previous course work that forms a basis for their upcoming work experience prior to the internship.

Ensuring curricular knowledge as a prerequisite before entering practice was also specified in programme outlines. For example, it was common for a programme outline to state: students must complete 'x' amount of course credit hours before being deemed eligible for 'x' internship. This suggests that there is a certain amount of theory and learning the student must undertake before being considered to be sufficiently competent to enter a professional workplace setting and/or be able to effectively contribute to an internship institution/organization.

Idea Generation

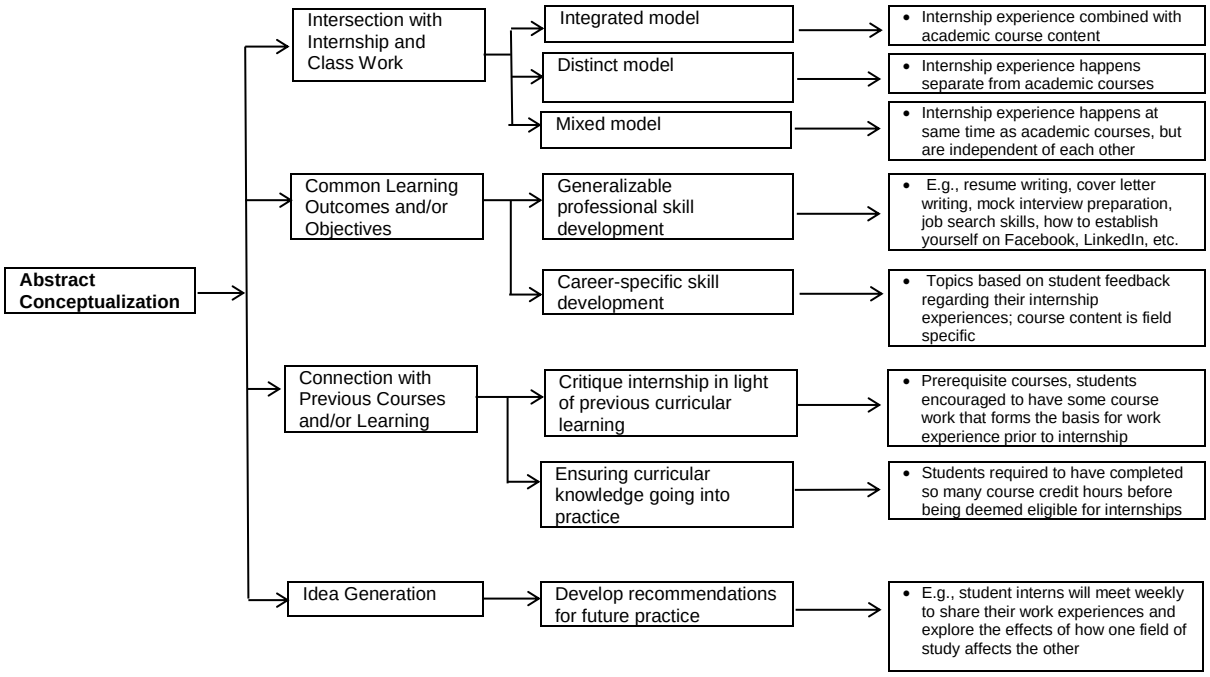
The development of recommendations for future practice was identified in several programme outlines as evidence of idea generation. For example, one programme outline stated that student interns would meet weekly to share their work experiences and explore the effects of how one field of study affects the other. Another example stated that students are required to: design a tutorial of approximately 18-22 PowerPoint slides or web screen shots to be used as a learning tool for another student or a work colleague. The tutorial should focus on learning a new skill or concept that is used within the particular industry. This tutorial should provide an understanding of industry standards, describe how the new knowledge has an impact on the individual's workflow, demonstrate how the learning of these skills or concepts contributes to the organization, and propose the potential for further professional development. The student is encouraged to think about the target learner, the knowledge one might bring to the tutorial and how this new knowledge might contribute to the industry sector.

Representation of Abstract Conceptualization Activities in Programme Outlines

The cognitive dimension of Kolb's experiential learning theory – abstract conceptualization – was the least represented in the programme outlines. Examples of class work intersecting with the practical experience of an internship, student's application of general and career-specific skills, and student's connection with previous curricular learning and demonstrations of idea generation were noticeably absent from the outlines. For example, requiring students to complete so many course credit hours before being eligible for participation in an internship program *suggests* a correlation between having adequate knowledge of theory before entering a practical experience. However, there appears to be no explicit planning or structure that confirms this postulation. The programme outlines identified the structure of many internship courses and whether or not they were integrated, separated, or mixed with academic course content, but did not provide explicit explanations as to how students were being evaluated on their ability to transmit practical experience

to theory. This is an interesting point to emphasize because it suggests that this particular experiential learning mode is ineffectively structured, lacking purposive conditions, structure, and evaluation of how students can generate intersections between practical experience and theory. Abstract conceptualization, its themes, sub-themes and meaning units are represented in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13: Abstract Conceptualization – Educational Conditions of Ontario Colleges and University Internship Programmes



The final learning mode examined in the programme outlines was active experimentation. This mode represents how students will take what they have learned and be able to apply it into practice or into their internship programme.

Active Experimentation

Definition

Active experimentation is the mode that best characterizes the "doers" (Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001, p. 3). This is where one applies what has been learned and conceptualized in theory and puts it into practice.

Examples of Best Practice

In the active experimentation phase of Kolb's theory, examples of best practice are represented through the students' ability to: apply new ideas, apply curricular learning to their internship, and apply skills into their internship. Each theme is described below, along with its corresponding sub-themes and meaning units. The

representation of the learning mode of active experimentation across the programme outlines is then presented.

Apply New Ideas

Commonly illustrated through the course outlines were opportunities for students to apply and share new ideas through the generation of research. For example, many programme outlines required the student to engage in an individual research assignment including an essay proposal, seminar presentation, peer-reviewed assignment, or final essay. The student's engagement in research was required to be based on a research question related to the student's internship field. Programme outlines stated that students' involvement in research allows them the opportunity to create novel ideas/practices to enhance personal/professional success and to adapt current ideas/practices in response to emerging needs in their internship field. The opportunity to apply and share new ideas was also exemplified through internship programmes that ask the student to join a pre-existing research team. This opportunity allowed students to learn from world-renowned scholars in their field and also meet these scholars to discuss and exchange ideas. Finally, students participating in internship research programmes often had the opportunity to present their work at a public showcase, providing exposure to that critical aspect of research: being able to describe one's work and explain its potential impact.

Apply Curricular Learning to Internship

Students' demonstration of learning through the development and/or implementation of a project supported the phase of applying curricular learning to the internship experience. For example, one programme outline required the student to facilitate a special event that met the needs of the clients. This required the student to recognize the steps involved in planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating a chosen programme, as well as to examine the ways in which they can modify a programme to meet the needs of the client. In another example, students undertook a project under the combined support and supervision of the host organization and course instructor, and through that process learned the challenges of the organization in its local and broader context. Together, these examples illustrated students' active involvement in the development and/or implementation of organization projects and the application of knowledge to these internship projects.

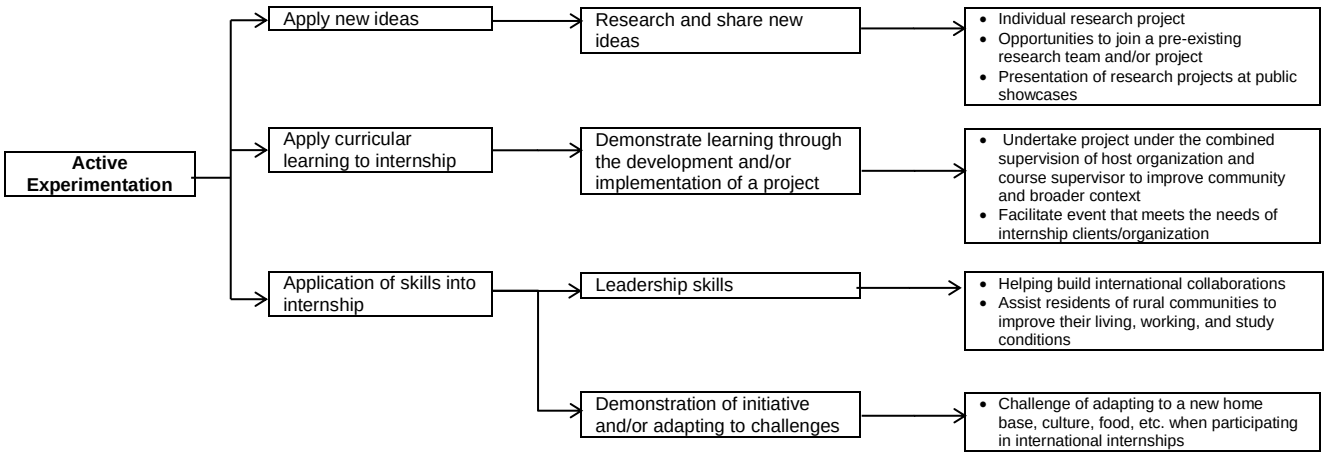
Application of Skills to Internship

Similar to students' application of curricular learning to their internships, programme outlines provided examples of how students might apply skills to their internship experiences. Programme outlines stated that students' potential to demonstrate leadership skills was facilitated through their engagement in international internships. As an example, one particular programme outline illustrated the opportunity for students to exemplify leadership skills by building solid foundations for Canada-Brazil collaborations in their field. As another example, the opportunity to assist residents of rural communities in Kenya to improve their living, working and study conditions was believed to enhance students' application of leadership skills in their internship. In addition to leadership, the demonstration of initiative and the student's ability to adapt to challenges was illustrated in the programme outlines. Internships that are offered overseas or internationally (e.g., Kenya or Greece) were described as a challenge because they required the students to adapt to a new home base, new culture, unfamiliar food, etc., in addition to performing the tasks and responsibilities required of them in their internship.

Representation of Active Experimentation Activities in Programme Outlines

The active experimentation mode of Kolb's experiential learning theory was not clearly identifiable in most outlines. Opportunities to apply new ideas through the generation of research were available primarily to those students who engaged in research-based internships. For those students participating in an internship program in a clinical setting or professional organization, the production of research and the opportunity to apply new ideas were not described explicitly in the programme outlines. This suggests that applying new ideas, as evidence to support the active experimentation mode within Kolb's experiential learning theory, was specific to research-based internship opportunities and was not well represented in non-research-based internships. In addition, connections between students' application of curricular learning and their internship were not made explicit, thus reinforcing the notion that active experimentation is not occurring. There were also no forms of evaluation to determine whether or not students were applying curricular learning into their internship programs. These data lead us to question the importance placed by internship programmes on the transfer of learning from an academic context to the internship context, and vice versa. Figure 14 illustrates the active experimentation mode and its themes, sub-themes and meaning units as represented through the programme outlines collected.

Figure 14: Active Experimentation – Educational Conditions of Ontario Colleges and University Internship Programmes



Summary

The results presented in Part 2 of this research illustrated the extent to which the internship programme outlines reflected the phases of experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984). Findings revealed that the programme outlines reviewed consisted of adequate representation of the concrete experience and reflective observation modes, and insufficient representation of the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation modes. From the perspective of Moore (2010), the greatest limitation of higher education experiential activities, including internship opportunities, is a lack of emphasis on learning and an overemphasis on the practical level in the experience – lacking a connection between experience and curricular learning. This proposition was supported by the findings that conditions for concrete experience and

reflective observation tend to be incorporated into the programme outlines but that the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation modes are absent. As all four learning modes must be addressed in order for learning to be most effective, the lack of representation of all four learning modes indicates that the conditions for optimal learning are not currently being met within Ontario higher education internship programmes.

Discussion

Recommendations for Enhancing the Educational Quality of Internships

Given the numerous and well-documented benefits of internships for all stakeholders, and their increasing popularity amongst postsecondary institutions, it is imperative to identify best practice for these experiences. The purpose of this study was to examine the internship opportunities facilitated by postsecondary institutions in Ontario and to assess the definitions, conditions and intended outcomes outlined by these programmes. The data were analyzed using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory to assist in identifying the educational value of these internship experiences. Grounding the findings in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory was critical for evaluating the educational component of internships as the theoretical framework outlines the process by which students tend to learn through experience effectively.

The initial emphasis of this study was to move towards proposing a standard definition for internships facilitated by postsecondary institutions. However, due to the numerous and important variations of definitions across internship programmes, the findings suggest that the focus should be on designing and implementing an optimal learning experience for all students, regardless of the individual variations between programmes. From this perspective, current and contentious debates surrounding intern compensation, engagement in meaningless tasks and discrepancies in employment rights would no longer be at the forefront. More specifically, increased attention to theoretically informed educational conditions, design and delivery would allow every student an opportunity to gain the most important asset of all: a high-quality educational experience.

Since internships are often facilitated by postsecondary institutions, it is appropriate that academic enrichment be the highest priority. Unfortunately, the academic quality of internships has been questioned (Alm, 1996), due to inadequate planning and a lack of theoretical emphasis (Hanson, 1984). In reference to Kolb's (1984) theory, the findings of this study reinforce these concerns and suggest that the internships offered in Ontario postsecondary institutions tend to overlook important requirements that would ensure a high-quality educational experience. Above all, it is important to acknowledge that it cannot simply be assumed that students will independently make connections between theory in the classroom and experiences in practice. The following section will pose recommendations for creating an optimal learning experience for students engaging in internships based upon Kolb's (1984) theory and the findings of this study.

Recommendation #1: Establish explicit learning activities that target each stage of experiential learning theory.

From a broad perspective, internships should emphasize educational experiences that develop and advance knowledge delivered in the classroom (Sides & Mrvica, 2007). To develop and advance this knowledge, it is important that the internship requires the learner to reflect and think critically about their experiences in the workplace (Sides & Mrvica, 2007). In addition, it is necessary for postsecondary institutions to develop and implement a theoretical component to internship experiences (Alpert, Heaney & Kuhn, 2009). As suggested by Sides and Mrvica (2007), successful internships require a clear description of the responsibilities, tasks and activities the student will engage in; an outline of the learning objectives to be met by the internship; and

established strategies for meeting these learning objectives. The establishment of clear expectations and learning objectives has been found to yield higher performance by interns in the workplace (Rothman, 2007).

While the suggestions posed by Sides and Mrvica (2007) are useful for the design and delivery of internships, these suggestions represent only two modes of learning in Kolb's (1984) theory: concrete experience and reflective observation. Interestingly, concrete experience and reflective observation were the modes best represented in our findings. Building on the criteria outlined by Sides and Mrvica (2007), Kolb's approach requires students to explore the abstract conceptualization and active experimentation stages, which encourage them to make critical connections between the internship and coursework, connect previous courses to current learning experiences, as well as develop and implement new ideas into practice. It is only when all four modes are well-represented that an optimal learning experience may be achieved (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010; Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainmelis, 2001). Therefore, the establishment of tasks and learning activities targeted towards active experimentation and abstract conceptualization is an important consideration moving forward.

Recommendation #2: Establish clear roles and responsibilities for all parties involved in the internship.

In order to enhance the educational value of internships, it is important to consider the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the organization and implementation of these experiences (i.e., student, institution and employer). As suggested by O'Neill (2010), to ensure that an experience is educational, it must be a collaborative effort, including discussions amongst students, academic faculty, course coordinators and industry professionals regarding internship goals. Using this approach, it is proposed that postsecondary institutions be responsible for creating the educational conditions for the internship using Kolb's (1984) theoretical framework. This would include but is not limited to: outlining learning objectives and outcomes; creating opportunities for critical reflection; encouraging the generation and implementation of new ideas; and establishing activities which promote intersection between the internship and coursework. With this pre-determined academic framework, the role of the industry professionals would be to consult with the course coordinator and student to establish challenging day-to-day tasks which allow the student to fulfill these goals. Further, the industry professional would be required to monitor these activities and provide feedback to the student throughout engagement in the internship. Finally, the main responsibilities of the student would be to maintain communication between themselves and the stakeholders, complete related coursework and meet the expectations of the internship experience (e.g., arrive on time, fulfill daily duties, etc.). It is suggested that progress meetings involving all three parties (i.e., student, institution and employer) take place throughout the internship to ensure that academic goals are being met and the working relationship remains collaborative. A comprehensive outline of the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder would mitigate some of the criticisms of internships identified by Hanson (1984), such as lack of proper planning and insufficient supervision throughout the internship.

Recommendation #3: Emphasize the Standards of Education over the Standards of Employment.

The final applied recommendation seeks a broader approach to fostering high-quality educational experiences through student internships. Both the existing literature and the media frequently raise issues surrounding the employment rights of students engaging in an internship, such as the right to financial compensation. One of the prominent issues surrounding employment rights lies in the exemption of unpaid interns from the protection of the Ontario Employment Standards Act and the Ontario Workers Act monitored by the Ministry of Labour. As previously mentioned, the exemption was created to "encourage employers to provide students enrolled in a college or university program with practical training to complement their

classroom learning" (Employment Standards Act, 2000). Consistent with an education-focused approach, it is proposed that the internship design and implementation be monitored by a new overarching set of standards: the Standards of Education. This broad set of principles would shift the focus from internship variations outside of the control of academic faculty and some industry professionals (e.g., willingness and feasibility to pay an intern), to standards that can be monitored and maintained across all internship programmes in Ontario higher education institutions. The Standards of Education would include broad guidelines for designing and implementing internship programmes using experiential learning theory, as well as ensuring students engage in meaningful tasks and experience a range of responsibilities and/or roles. In addition to a rewarding academic experience for the interns, industry professionals would benefit from this education-focused approach. More specifically, employers would have access to higher quality interns who possess a stronger understanding of theory related to their academic discipline and are able to translate their knowledge to a practical setting. Monitoring the use of these educational standards in postsecondary student internships would become a responsibility of the Ministry of Education. It is speculated that these standards would also ensure that fewer issues arise regarding exemption from or protection under the Ontario Employment Standards Act and the Ontario Workers Act.

Consistent with an education-focused approach, it is recommended that "experiential education" be adopted as the appropriate terminology in the future. Experiential education would serve as a suitable term for these experiences, as it encompasses all work-integrated learning opportunities and places an expectation for educational quality on the experience. It is important to note that if "experiential education" is chosen as the appropriate terminology moving forward, researchers must specify the focus on work-integrated learning opportunities, as experiential learning can also include strategies to foster other high-quality educational experiences (e.g., student life, career services).

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that internship programmes currently offered through Ontario postsecondary institutions do have some educational benefits. However, the programmes require several improvements with respect to design and delivery in order to provide an optimal learning experience. The first recommendation is to create learning activities that specifically target each mode of experiential learning theory. The second recommendation is to establish a clear outline of the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder to ensure this education-focused approach is executed most effectively and that the internship is beneficial for all parties involved. The final recommendation involves shifting the focus from the Standards of Employment to the Standards of Education. With these recommendations, the design and delivery of internships would be influenced by a new overarching set of principles that indicate best practice for experiential education.

Study Limitations

It is important to recognize the limitations of this study in order to strengthen future research in this field. The two major limitations are found within the methods that were chosen for this study. The first limitation of this study is in the use of the word "internship." Due to the distinct focus on "internship" programmes, all other work-integrated learning opportunities offered through postsecondary institutions, including practicums, apprenticeships, field placements, co-operative education, etc., were not examined. It is speculated that many of these opportunities are offered through postsecondary institutions and possess a similar structure to the internship programmes discussed in this study.

The second limitation of this study involves the methods chosen for data collection. With regards to the analyzing of website content, it is recognized that postsecondary institutions may not prioritize the advertisement of their internship opportunities in detail online. Consequently, the data collected from the postsecondary institutions' websites may not necessarily align with content covered throughout the internship experience. In an effort to expand our knowledge surrounding the intricacies of these opportunities, course

outlines associated with the internship programmes offered were collected. Despite contacting all postsecondary institutions offering internship programmes, course outlines were not always available. In these instances, it was challenging to assess the academic content covered in these internships. Again, the findings derived from the analysis of programme outlines are limited to that information prioritized and included in the programme outlines reviewed.

Future Directions

The existing literature and the findings of this study suggest many avenues for future research. From an applied perspective, it is recommended that future research explore the possibility of creating an "internship programme toolkit" to include components such as the Standards of Education, best practice tips for enhancing the educational value of internships, and practical examples of activities, evaluation measures and course content to be used by course coordinators of internship programmes. This toolkit would be beneficial for academic faculty and industry professionals who are interested in providing high-quality educational experiences for student interns. Following a trial period of implementation with the toolkit, it is important to evaluate the use and effectiveness of the toolkit in practice.

From a theoretical perspective, several questions involving programme enhancement should be explored. First, it would be useful for researchers to collaborate with internship programme coordinators to determine the resources that coordinators feel are required to enhance the educational value of their programmes. This may include aspects such as additional programme funding or strategies for organization and management of internship programmes.

Second, as per the recommendation for establishing roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, it would be important to identify one individual to be responsible for resolving potential conflicts and solving issues that may arise for the purposes of maintaining positive and enriching relationships between all parties.

Finally, the scope of this study focused on internship programmes facilitated by postsecondary institutions. However, there were instances in which internship programmes were advertised on an institution's website but were facilitated by independent organizations. Given the education-focused approach to internships proposed, it is important to ascertain where the responsibility lies for ensuring the academic value of the internships offered outside postsecondary institutions.

Conclusion

Internship programmes have been recognized as an important avenue by which to link classroom learning and professional practice. They have been associated with many benefits for all stakeholders involved, including career exploration for students (Sattler, 2011), stronger recruitment for postsecondary institutions (Divine et al., 2007), and an opportunity for industry professionals to recruit students with current theoretical knowledge of the workforce (Sattler, 2011). Despite the increasing popularity of internships, questions have been raised about the best ways to design and deliver these experiences in order to optimize benefits for all stakeholders. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the student internship opportunities offered by direct-entry postsecondary programmes in Ontario and identify the ways in which these experiences are defined, the conditions associated with them and intended outcomes of participation. In addition, the educational quality of internships was assessed using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning framework.

The first phase of data collection involved reviewing the websites of postsecondary institutions and collecting information regarding all advertised internship programmes. The intention of this phase of data collection was to ascertain the definitions, prerequisites and conditions of internships. The findings of this phase suggested

substantial variation across internship programmes offered by postsecondary institutions. These variations included but were not limited to discrepancies in the required time commitment, prerequisites, participation fees and compensation.

The second phase of data collection involved collecting internship programme outlines from the postsecondary institutions and examining these outlines with reference to Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory framework. The findings indicated that internship programmes currently offered in Ontario postsecondary institutions often overlook important requirements for optimal learning. More specifically, the results are interpreted to suggest that the learning conditions needed to ensure optimal educational quality of internships are not being met.

Three major recommendations were proposed to enhance the educational value of internship programmes, including: establishing explicit and purposeful learning activities that target each phase of experiential learning theory (Kolb,1984); outlining clear roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder involved in the internship; and emphasizing the Standards of Education over the Standards of Employment. By focusing on the educational quality of the internship experience, many of the controversial issues currently at the forefront of internship-related discussions, such as lack of theoretical relevance and supervision, engagement in meaningless tasks and intern exploitation, would be mitigated.

Several applied and theoretical directions for future research have been discussed. From an applied standpoint, the development of an internship programme toolkit for use by academic faculty and industry professionals, which assists in actualizing the educational recommendations outlined in this study, is warranted. This toolkit would provide stakeholders with tangible tools for implementing high-quality educational internships. From a theoretical perspective, there are several important questions to explore, including: who is responsible for ensuring the educational quality of internships fostered by organizations outside of postsecondary institutions; how to manage relationships between stakeholders when issues arise; and the types of resources needed by course coordinators to enhance the quality of internships.

Above all, it is proposed that the quality of an internship experience is not determined by variable factors such as the time commitment required or financial gain, but rather by the educational enrichment of the experience. Accordingly, internships need to be structured deliberately, in congruence with experiential learning theory, to realize the benefits of these experiences for all stakeholders.

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