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# A Survey of AACSB Accredited Institutions and the Use of Work Experiences as Part of the Business Curricula

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*This paper describes a survey of all American AACSB-accredited schools of business. The survey gathered information concerning work experiences (internships or cooperative education) required or offered in business curricula. Of the targeted schools, 133 responded. Results are presented regarding internship characteristics (prerequisites, student compensation, and course credit); assessment of students' performance (grading, learning objectives, academic and work components of grade determination); and administrative issues (site visits, release time, and faculty compensation). Of the 133 respondents, 12 require work experience of all majors, 14 require it of some majors, 88 offer but do not require, and 19 offer no work experience.*

**Key Words:** Internships, AACSB, Business Curricula

**Disciplines of Interest:** All Business Disciplines

## INTRODUCTION

### Background and Applicable Literature

Kerka [1999] outlines the background of cooperative education and details the perceived benefits of various experiential learning methods. For example, "... cooperative education fosters self-directed learning, reflective practice, and transformative learning; and integrates school and work learning experiences that are grounded in adult learning theories." Some attempts at empirical support for the benefits of work experiences include English and Koeppen [1993]. Although contrary to what some other studies found, English and Koeppen found enhanced academic performance after accounting students participated in internships. They also report on prior studies which examined the effects of internships on students' interviewing success, as well as subsequent professional performance, both of which were positive. However, the benefits of practical work experience are intuitively obvious and appealing. Work experience helps bridge the gap

between the study of theory and the application of such theory, because students see the practical application (or in some cases, the misapplication) of academic theory first-hand.

Including a work experience as part of students' curriculum helps to address some perceived negative aspects of higher education. In the past several years, much criticism has been aimed at business schools for lack of relevance in management education. Lack of experiential learning has been at the top of the list of deficiencies. For example, Pearce, in the *Academy of Management Executive*, in May, 1999, reports Pelton's claim that "some critics have alleged that business schools are unresponsive to the needs of the business community, and that faculty are underproductive, esoteric technophobes who teach obsolete notions about business practice under the protection of an arcane tenure system." The article goes on to identify several facets of business education under attack, including relevance, cost, method of delivery, and timeliness, or value.

With a more narrow focus, in 1990, the Accounting Education Change Commission [AECC, 1990]

sharply criticized the accounting academy for clinging to the traditional teaching model of lecture, memorization, and examinations. However, these charges could be leveled at many areas of the university. The AECC claimed that students "must understand the basic internal workings of organizations," and that the desired capabilities of students, in addition to technical accounting knowledge, must include communication, as well as intellectual and interpersonal skills. "Active Learning" has become one goal for educators, since students learn better when they are engaged in their own learning, than when they are *simply passive recipients of information*. [Bonwell et al., 1991] Work experience, where students learn by doing and applying, seems to epitomize "active learning," and therefore is one approach to dealing with the above criticisms. In fact, the benefits to learning through an internship include that it "integrates formal class training with first hand experience in a professional environment, exposes students to problems and data not available in the classroom setting, and helps students understand the relevance of what they have learned in the class." [Kerka, 1999]

The *U.S. News & World Report*, in the November 17, 1997 issue, reported "nearly 1 in 5 institutions ... requires that students take internships as a condition of graduation." [Tooley, 1997] The author further reports that "nine out of 10 four-year colleges now offer some sort of structured work experience connected to a student's major or career interest, according to the American Council on Education." The next question for business educators is how prevalent are work experiences in business curricula.

### Purpose and Research Objectives

In this paper, we present results of a survey of all American AACSB-accredited schools of business. The survey asked for information concerning the use of work experiences, through either internship or cooperative education programs, required or offered as part of business curricula. The objectives of the research are to gather information about the number of business programs offering and/or requiring work experiences, paying attention to various characteristics such as academic, administrative, etc.

In the following sections, we will describe the sample, present results, and finally draw conclusions,

offer recommendations, and discuss future research ideas.

### SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The population of interest was all United States educational institutions that are accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Of the 359 surveys sent, 133 were returned, resulting in a 37 percent response rate. One possible bias in the current research is that schools that do not offer internships were probably less likely to respond to this survey than schools that do offer them.

The responses of the 133 returned questionnaires constitute the sample for this study. A few questions were not answered by every responding school, so the frequency of response will be seen to vary from question to question. For example, 132 schools responded to the question asking how many faculty members are in the business school, but only 128 schools responded to the question asking how many faculty members are at the institution.

Respondents used a wide variety of terms to describe practical work experience programs. For example, 75 programs are called internships, seven are called cooperative education, and 27 use both terms. It is unclear what criteria institutions used to name their programs. Technically, "cooperative education" refers to alternating academic and work experiences, the latter usually at the same organization. "Internship" usually refers to a single, practical work experience, often during the academic year. The spirit of work experience, however, can be captured by Stretch and Harp, who refer to an internship as "controlled experiential learning where a student receives academic credit while employed by an organization in a chosen area of interest." [Stretch and Harp, 1991] Although not all the programs in this study meet such a definition in the strictest sense, we believe the term "internship" captures the spirit of the work experience, and therefore loosely use the term "internship" to refer to these practical work experience programs.

### Institutional Size

There is a large range in the size of the

educational institutions that form the sample, as reported in Table 1. We report the number of students and faculty for the entire institution as a whole, and for the business school alone. For the entire educational institution, the number of students ranges from 1,800 to 44,000, while the number of faculty ranges from 77 to 2,975. For the college of business, the number of students ranges from 330 to 10,790 and the number of faculty ranges from 14 to 277. The median observations are 13,000 students and 600 faculty members at the institution, and 1,825 students and 60 faculty members in the college of business.

### Institutional Classification

Survey respondents were asked to classify the nature of their institution. The response was fairly evenly split between research and teaching institutions (see Table 2). Of the 125 respondents to this question, 53 classified themselves as research institutions, 48 as teaching, and 24 as both. In the first category, 36 grant both doctorate and MBA degrees, 16 grant MBA degrees only, and one grants neither advanced degree.

For the 48 teaching institutions, one grants both doctorate and MBA degrees, 39 grant MBA degrees only, and eight grant no advanced degrees. For the 24 that classified themselves as both research and teaching, six grant both doctorate and MBA degrees, 17 grant MBA degrees only, and one grants neither.

### Programs Offering Work Experience Opportunities

Of the 133 respondents, 114 offer an internship or cooperative education program to their students, while 19 do not (see Table 3). While a preponderance of the respondents offer internship opportunities, very few, only 26, require an internship as part of the business curriculum. Of these 26, only 12 require an internship for all business students, while another 14 require it for some business majors. Table 4 presents a list of the majors for which an internship was required by schools not requiring it of all majors. For example, one school reported it requires an internship *only for sports management majors and one required it only for travel and tourism majors*. Of the twelve schools that require an internship of some, but not all majors, nine required an internship of only one major and three required it of more than one (but not all)

majors.

Findings described in the following sections are based on the 114 institutions that either require or offer work experiences to their students.

## INTERNSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

Only six schools considered the internship to be part of a broad program of professional development. Interestingly, only one of these six requires an internship of all its students. Further, of the 12 that require internships for all business majors, only one describes it as part of a professional development experience.

### Prerequisites for Work Experiences

Prerequisites relate mostly to the number of accumulated hours and cumulative GPA. Eighty-six schools responded to the question relating to class standing. Most schools required students to have reached near-junior standing, defined as 60 semester credit hours (see Table 5). In fact, 59 percent of respondents require between 55 and 60 hours, with the mean being 61.6 hours.

Only 70 institutions answered the minimum GPA question, with a result of minimum GPA ranging between 2.0 and 3.5 (see Table 6). Half the sample's minimum GPA was somewhere between 2.5 to 2.7, while the mean was 2.51.

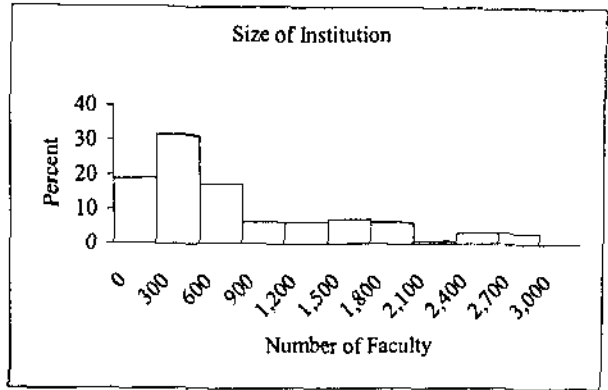
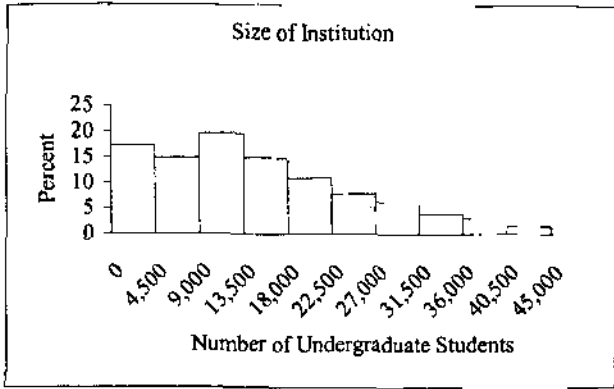
Some colleges and universities provided information on course prerequisites for an internship. Most of these schools required at least sophomore level business courses be taken prior to the internship. This information corresponds with our earlier finding that most programs require at least junior standing.

### Student Compensation

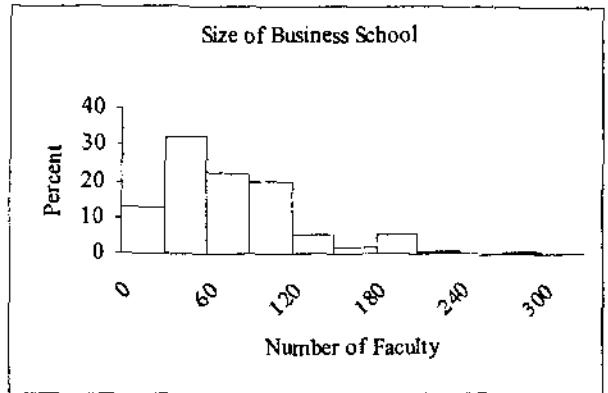
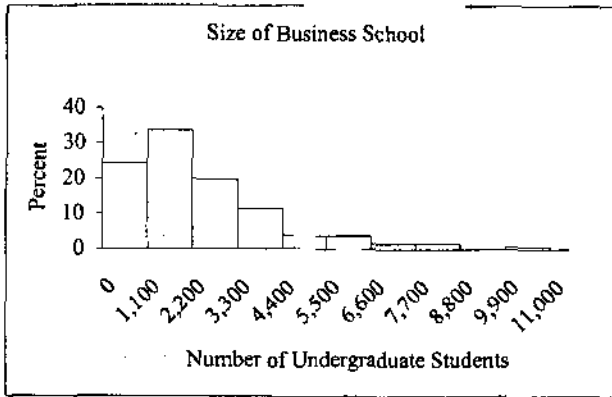
Paid internships are the norm for the sample; 83 of the schools (73 percent) report that interns are paid at least most of the time (see Table 7). Only two schools reported that work experiences are never paid. *This is not surprising, since it seems reasonable that students perform better when they are paid, and employers provide more meaningful work experience when they have to pay. If interns are paid, employer expectations of interns are more likely to match their*

**Table 1. Size of Survey Respondents**

**Panel A: Size of Institution**



**Panel B: Size of Business School**



**Table 2. Institutional Self-Classification**

	Research Institution	Teaching Institution	Both	Totals
Doctorate Only	0	0	0	0
Doctorate & MBA	36	1	6	43
MBA Only	16	39	17	72
No Graduate Degree	1	8	1	10
Totals	53	48	24	125

expectations of regular employees than if interns are not paid. When employer expectations of interns more closely match their expectations of regular employees,

interns get a more realistic, hence better, learning experience.

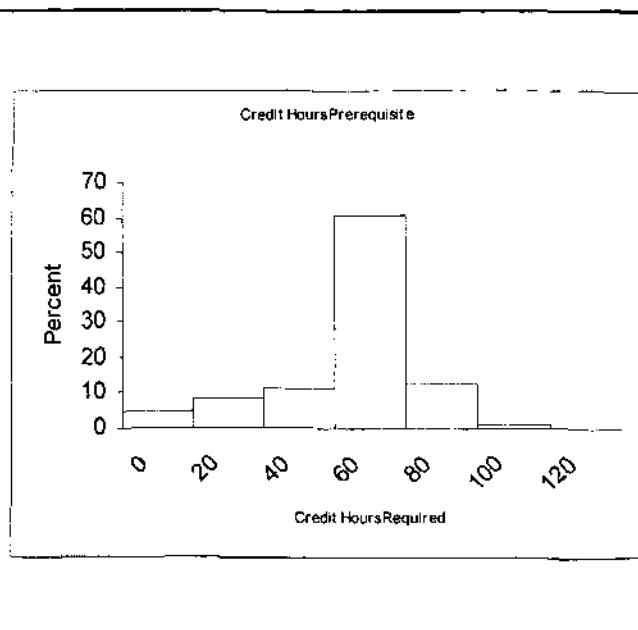
**Table 3. Internship Availability**

		Yes	No
Do you offer a work experience of any kind?		114	19
Is the work experience part of a broader program (part of a professional development program, for example)?		6	27
Is the work experience required as part of the business curriculum?	Some	14	119
	All	12	121

**Table 4: Majors Listed By the Twelve Schools Requiring an Internship of Some But Not All Majors**

Major for Which Internship is Required	Number of Schools
International Business	4
Management or General Business	3
Management Information Systems	2
Accounting	1
Health Care Management	1
Hospitality Management	1
Hotel & Restaurant Administration	1
Marketing	1
Operations Management	1
Public Administration	1
Sports Management	1
Travel & Tourism	1

**Table 5. Credit Hours Prerequisite**



**Course Credit**

There is quite a variety in the number of credits students earn for internships. Of the 113 schools that answered this question, almost 10 percent give no credit for internships. Most schools (51 percent) award a fixed number of credits. As can be seen in panel A of Table 8, most schools award three credits for an internship.

Forty percent of the schools in the sample allow a range of credit between one and 12 hours, depending on the work experience. As can be seen in panel B of Table 8, the range extends from zero to twelve credits. The most commonly offered range of credits (offered by 15 schools) is from 1 to 3 credits. Two schools offer as many as 12 credits.

**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE**

Assessment involves aspects such as whether students receive a grade and the nature of the grade, whether students complete academic assignments, whether formal learning objectives guide the assignments, who evaluates students' work, and the role of the employers' evaluations in determining the grade.

**Grades**

Some schools (six percent) do not give grades at all; some (11 percent) use two types of assessment outcome measures, giving a combination of letter grades and/or pass/fail; while 31 percent give only

**Table 6. GPA Prerequisites**

Lower		Upper	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative	
					Frequency	Percent
2.00	<	2.25	15		15	21.4
2.25	<	2.50	1	1.4	16	22.9
2.50	<	2.75	37	21.4	53	75.7
2.75	<	3.00	6	8.6	59	84.3
3.00	<	3.25	10	14.3	69	98.6
3.25	<	3.50	0	0	69	98.6
3.50	<	3.75	1	1.4	70	100.0

**Table 7. Student Compensation**

	Frequency of Student Compensation	Percent
Always	46	40
Most of the time	37	33
It's optional	28	25
Never	2	2
Totals	113	100

letter grades (see Table 9). However, the largest group, 52 percent, does not give a letter grade at all; rather they use pass/fail, satisfactory/unsatisfactory, or credit/no credit type grading systems. The fact that a majority of the schools (at least 58 percent) do not assign a letter grade indicates that emphasis in most programs is on the work experience rather than the academic nature or aspects of the internship.

**Grade Composition**

We are interested in the portion of the grade allocated to work experience versus an academic component. The results are influenced a great deal by the fact that most programs do not assign a letter grade, accordingly, of the 113 respondents answering this question, 56 (50 percent), and 62 (55.4 percent), respectively, do not consider either work experience

or academic requirements as inputs to the grading. These results are consistent with programs that look only at whether the internship was successfully completed, with no attempt at measuring the level of performance.

While looking at results for the 35 schools at which grades do reflect the level of performance, we find that 13 schools, representing 37 percent of the grade-giving institutions in the sample, do not consider the academic component at all when assigning these grades (see Table 10). In addition, 24 of the 35 schools (69 percent) base less than half of the grade on academic aspects of the work experience.

Of the 113 schools, 94 require employers to evaluate students' performance. Of those 94, 82 say the employers' evaluations are used as a component in determining students' grades, whether or not grades are based on letters, pass/fail, etc. (see Table 11).

**Learning Objectives**

Of the 113 programs, 52 percent state they have formal learning objectives associated with the work experience. One example of a set of formal learning objectives reflects those of many respondents:

Students should be able to:

- identify, integrate, and apply technical major content and knowledge to their job situation
- identify, integrate, and apply concepts, principles, and/or theories from other business disciplines or business core (e.g. organizational behavior, economics, marketing, etc.) to their job environment

**Table 8. Panel A: Number of Credit Hours Awarded for Internships**

Hours of Credit Awarded	Number of Schools	Percent
0	11	10
1	5	4
2	0	0
3	51	44
4	4	3
Awards a range	45	39
Totals	116	100

**Panel B: Number of Schools Offering the Following Ranges of Credit**

Starting Point in Range of Credits Awarded				Ending Point In Range of Credits Awarded
0	1	2	3	
				1
				2
2	15	2		3
1	5	2		4
		1	1	5
2	4		4	6
				7
				8
	2		1	9
				10
				11
	2			12

- demonstrate skills in communications (oral, written, small group discussion, and listening), information literacy and technology, critical thinking and problem-solving, and interpersonal relationships (teamwork, leadership, etc.)
- demonstrate awareness and understanding of issues in ethics and globalization
- articulate how their work experience has enhanced their professional, academic, and personal growth, as well as their career development.

**Table 9. Types of Student Grading**

Type of Grade Given	Frequency
Letter Grade	35
Letter or Pass/Fail	12
Pass/Fail, Unsatisfactory/Satisfactory, Credit/No Credit	58
Not Graded	7
Depends	1
Totals	113

**Table 10. Fraction of Work Experience Grade Allocated to Work Component and Academic Component by Institutions Issuing Letter Grades**

Fraction	Proportion of Grade Based on	
	Work Component	Academic Component
None	9	13
Less than 50%	12	5
50%	4	6
Greater than 50%	7	9
100%	3	2
Totals	35	35

**Table 11: Use of Employer Evaluations**

Are Employers Required to Evaluate Student Performance?		
Yes	No	Total Respondents
94	19	113
Are Employer Evaluations A Component in Grade Determination?		
Yes	No	
82	12	

**Table 12. Prevalence of Oral And Written Academic Components**

Neither	12
Oral Only	1
Written Only	65
Both	35
Totals	113



Even though most schools do not assign a letter grade for the overall work experience, most involve some academic component. Of the 113, 78 percent require some assignments of an academic nature. The data did not provide information as to whether the assignments are driven by the learning objectives.

### Academic Component

In most programs, students are required to provide written and/or oral reports about their internship experiences. This is somewhat surprising given that almost half the programs do not specify formal learning objectives. However, if the reports are limited to summaries of students' work experiences, they do not have an academic component, which is more consistent with the lack of learning objectives. Twelve (11 percent) of 113 responding schools require neither a written nor an oral report on the internship experience, while 35 schools (31 percent) require both (see Table 12). One school (one percent) requires an oral but no written report, while most (58 percent) require written but no oral reports. We find it interesting that so many schools require some type of formal report, yet such a small percentage claimed that they use the formal reports in measuring students' performance, and assigning grades. If reports are simple summaries of students' work experiences as opposed to learning in academic sense, however, this might be more reasonable.

### ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Although most programs designate a person who is responsible for the work experience program, the titles vary widely enough that it is unclear as to whether administration, faculty, or staff actually administer the programs. For example, the titles used include coordinator, director, manager, counselor, or supervisor. These titles could be held by faculty or staff; either part- or full-time, or either low or high levels of staff.

### Site Visits

To the question, are site visits to employers required, 46 (42 percent) and 64 (58 percent) of the schools answered yes or no, respectively. It would be

interesting to know the frequency of the site visits; for example, if an employer hires students every semester, is a site visit done every semester. It would be interesting to have data about the frequency and nature of site visits, for example, what kind of information is collected and who does the site visit (faculty or staff).

### Faculty Involvement

Faculty do seem to be involved, in fact 88 institutions (78 percent) said faculty are involved in their internship programs. Questions designed to reveal the degree to which educational institutions place value on this faculty involvement reflect less enthusiasm by the institution, however. For example, only 40 percent of the responding institutions value faculty involvement as reflected by inclusion of internship responsibilities as part of the course load, while only 16 percent provide separate or extra compensation to faculty for involvement in the internship program.

### CONCLUSIONS

The most surprising finding was that so few schools (five) consider the work experience to be part of the broader program of professional development. Given the importance of experiential learning, it was also surprising that only 12 colleges or universities (fewer than 10 percent of the responding schools) require formal work experience of all business majors; and only another 14 schools require work experience of some business majors. It may be that the number of schools requiring work experience has decreased, as Kent et al. found in 1995 that "less than 20 percent of the schools stated the internships were a requirement for graduation." Their sample was drawn from AACSB member institutions, however, while the present study includes the presumably higher-quality subset: American AACSB-accredited institutions. One would hope that the importance placed on helping students make the transition to the professional world has not diminished over this time span.

Further research is desirable to assess the nature of the academic component in work experience, and its role in helping students develop their professional stature. Given that enhanced student learning is a major objective of work experience, it follows that

mechanisms should be developed that will help assess the perceived benefits of work experience. In fact, Kent and Swift (2000) suggest that "unless there is a rigorous evaluation procedure for internships, it may be difficult to accurately evaluate the intern's performance." However, we found little evidence of any evaluation procedures, since most programs report no formal learning objectives or academic component, and do not assign letter grades. This is necessary, if the full benefits of work experiences are to be taken advantage of. The practical benefits are clear: students gain work experience, exposure to professional work environments, etc. However, the academic benefits are just as desirable, although more difficult to implement and measure. For example, an academic benefit might be students demonstrating their ability to connect and integrate theories with practice. While this is often offered as an objective of internships, without a strong academic component, it is unlikely students will achieve it.

Work experiences should be part of a broader professional development program, of which the internship is a component. Pearce reports that "... virtually every facet of collegiate business education has come under attack for its relevance, ..." Work experiences help mitigate that lack of relevance, and in addition help students develop the ability to clearly see the connections between academic concepts and their practical application. They also help students begin to develop professional demeanor in areas such as business etiquette and behavior. It seems that if students and faculty view them, and structure them this way, students should have a smoother transition from university to career and therefore be more valuable to employers. One would think this would certainly increase students' satisfaction with their university experience.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Jillian Snyder and Jaimie Oppermann for their assistance in data entry and tabulation.

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