
The Impact of Fashion Merchandising Internships on Careers

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Abstract

This research describes the exploration, expansion, and enhancement of fashion merchandising internships from 1998-2010 in a small fashion merchandising program of 100 students in a mid-sized southern state university. This study examines the relationship of the college internship and the graduate's current job. Academic departments continuously review curriculum and consider the inclusion, continuation, enhancement, or deletion of a college internship in their programs. Often questions arise, such as, Should the fashion merchandising program curriculum require an internship for credit; what is the value of the internship; is an internship experience measureable? Internship records were kept for 13 years at a United States public university. Number, internship placement sites, and current employment of college graduates was analyzed. The purposes of this study were to examine the components of fashion merchandising internships and assess the impact of factors such as university regulations and small town internship employers on students' careers after graduation. This research study revealed that internships at non-local fashion businesses were positively related to successful current fashion employment. Continuation of an internship program is determined by internship placement sites, graduates' current jobs and locations, local and non-local fashion businesses, and faculty recommendations.

Keywords: Business education, cooperative education, fashion merchandising, fashion marketing, internship, retailing.

Statement of the Problem

Fashion merchandising internships in smaller towns and smaller markets do not afford college students vigorous experience much beyond general sales. Is the internship a valuable experience paving the road for after-graduation employment in fashion retailing?

A commonality of many universities that include fashion, apparel, merchandising, cooperative education, or retail management programs is the offering of an internship experience that counts toward degree matriculation. Strickler (2004) found that 40% of institutions with programs in fashion merchandising or related areas required internships. The study of fashion merchandising (fashion marketing, retailing, apparel marketing, or other deemed appropriate experiential learning names) is administratively located in diverse disciplines and divisions in the United States higher education system. Within those programs internships may be offered for credit or non-credit, may or may not be required in the curriculum, and may be found by the individual student or with the guidance of an internship coordinator.

Relevant Literature Review

The collaboration of colleges and businesses acting as a team to enhance professional education first started at the University of Cincinnati in 1906 (Hartley & Thiel, 1997). Research studies confirmed that internships are advantageous for college graduates by increasing their monetary compensation, reducing the time sought for first positions in careers, and enhancing overall job satisfaction (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000). Burnseed (2010) reported that university officials and employers almost universally maintain that partaking in an internship sets a student apart from his or her peers and is integral to finding meaningful employment in today's job market. The general objectives of an internship experience are to prepare students with realistic career expectations, provide opportunities to polish career search skills, and gain on-the-job experience (Sheldon, 1985).

Internships have varying degrees of purposes and effectiveness and provide students with opportunities to apply classroom knowledge. Internships further aid students to reflect on their individual strengths, weaknesses, and interests. The intern experience helps students form a network in the professional arena (Paulins, 2008). Some internship programs are designed to empower students and to build collaborative relationships with the local community (Angelique, 2001). Some researchers believe a retail management internship is a means for students to find career-oriented employment (Callanan & Benzing 2004). Internships also allow the employer to get a feel for the intern's abilities before hiring permanently (Burgess 2005).

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There is division in academia whether the internship experience is worthy of course credit (Young & Baker 2004). Depending on the university program, internships may or may not be required for graduation, may be elective, and may be worth college credits of varying amounts.

Internship, co-op, and experiential learning programs vary among universities. Decisions in academia need to be made regarding credit/no credit, required/optional, length, full-time/part-time, among other considerations. The specifications of what is

required for an internship also vary. Often junior management level activities are required for a college level fashion merchandising internship, such as scheduling, inventory analysis, supervision, display, opening/closing registers, direct customer contact, advertising/promotion activities, sales analysis, order handling, buying, store operations, expense control, and assortment strategies.

Grade point average (GPA) is a criterion sometimes used to determine the preparedness of students prior to their internship placement. GPA might be one measure of success, but does not necessarily embody determination or career success as found by Beard and Morton (1999). Although Beard and Morton found that GPA was a less important predictor of internship success, Bacon (2006) found that GPA was a valuable indicator of job success.

Internship opportunities in the fashion field are typically of three types: 1) store-based; 2) corporate office; and 3) others, such as assistant to a stylist, fashion director, vendor, and so forth (Paulins, 2008). Faculty and/or program administrators decide on acceptable types of internship experiences. In Paulins' research study other types of internships were more satisfying to students because there was enough variety of activities when compared to store-based and corporate office internships.

Overview of the internship program. A six credit internship course is required of every fashion merchandising student. The internship course is taken after the junior year (after 90 semester credits) during the summer between junior and senior year, or the fall or spring semester of the student's senior year. Most of the internship jobs were local (83%) and part time (85%) while the student continued their on-campus studies during the fall or spring semester. Students obtained their own internship position. Students were provided basic guidelines for internship positions: Work experience should involve junior management level activities such as scheduling, inventory analysis, supervision, display, opening/closing registers and the store, direct customer contact, advertising/promotion activities, sales analysis, order handling, buying, store operations, expense control, assortment strategies, among others.

The internship course was required for students to: 1) Practice and apply concepts learned in the classroom in a retail setting; 2) learn by doing; 3) network; and 4) explore the continuance of working in the fashion retail world. No measurements of student learning outcomes are reported in this research study. Researchers drew inferences from students' responses while collecting data on their current job. After completing an internship students prepared a written report and an oral VHS/DVD presentation of their internship experience. Faculty reviewed the reports and presentations and discussed past internship experiences with future internship students.

The community setting and retail shopping availability. The university is located in a smaller city with a population of 122,000 with a regional population of 224,000 (U.S. Census, 2013). There is one major shopping center (enclosed mall) with smaller

franchise tenants that are anchored by four full-sized department stores (Dillard's, J. C. Penney, Macy's, Sears) and 50 specialty stores (Ann Taylor, Banana Republic, Buckle, Cache, Coldwater Creek, Express, Gap, Talbots, and Victoria Secret, among others). There is a central business district (a downtown), where boutique locally-owned stores are the only fashion businesses. There are secondary and neighborhood business districts, strings, and isolated locations for fashion retailing within a 10 mile radius. The nearest larger city with multiple, planned shopping centers is 60 miles away. The nearest city where buying offices or headquarters are located is 450 miles away.

The university: classification, student profile. There are 15,000 undergraduate students at the university in this study. The majority of the university's students come from a 75 mile radius while the students usually remain in or near their home town after college graduation. Approximately 25% of enrolled students live at home while attending the university. Of the fashion merchandising students, 98% are female.

Internship criteria and placement. Since 1990 the fashion merchandising program at the 4 year, public, southern university has required students to complete a 6 credit semester internship for a Bachelor of Science degree. Internship prerequisites include a 2.5 GPA, minimum of 90 earned credits, minimum grade of "C" in Promotion, Advanced Buying, and Retailing. Students must find their own paid or unpaid internship with junior management activities.

From AY 98-2008 faculty were not paid to teach the internship course during the summer session due to low enrollment; the occasional summer internship was unsupervised, the student paid extra tuition for the course, there was no faculty remuneration. Students usually enrolled in internships during the fall or spring semesters because their scholarships covered internship class tuition and they could concurrently enroll in other classes at the university. In academic year 2008 administrative changes were made at the program level: 1) A new internship faculty member urged students to seek non-local internships and mandated that local internships be more than sales associates; 2) the internship class would no longer be offered in the fall semester; 3) faculty would be paid to teach summer internship. In summer of 2008 eight students enrolled in summer internship.

Most students chose to enroll in a local internship (within a 30 mile radius). If a student wanted a non-local internship during the fall or spring semester they were essentially electing to stay in school an extra semester. In the 13 year period of time 21 students (13%) opted to do a non-local internship. Fifteen of the 21 students (71%) obtained their non-local internship during academic years 2009 and 2010 when there was a change in administrative policy.

Local internship opportunities available in the community were store-based in department, specialty, or boutique stores. Department store opportunities included Dillard's, J.C. Penney's, Macy's, and Sear's. Specialty store opportunities included nationally recog-

nized stores such as Abercrombie and Fitch, Banana Republic, Cache, GAP, Hollister, and Talbots, among others. A third type of fashion retail store internship found by the majority of students in this study was in locally-owned, small boutiques. The last type of internship allowed for credit was a non-local internship. Students found positions as assistants-in-training, apprentices, junior managers, and so forth in major cities such as Chicago, London, Los Angeles, and New York. Examples of firms included Anthropologie, Burberry's, Dolce and Gabanna, Elie Tahari, and Links of London.

National events. During this thirteen year period of study there were several major national events potentially impacting the internship program. Students were hesitant to leave the community and the nearness of their families due to the 9-11 crisis and multiple hurricanes, primarily Katrina in 2005. The national recession and soaring fuel prices impacted the community in the latter half of the 2000 decade.

Sociological makeup. The vast majority (98%) of students enrolled in the fashion merchandising program were from local high schools, had long standing family occupancy in the geographic region, and were southern in tradition and upbringing. Students generally remained in the geographic region after graduation.

Internship study at a southern public university. From the academic year (AY) 1998 through AY 2010, student internships were monitored and recorded in a fashion merchandising program at a southern public university. There were a total of 169 fashion merchandising internships during the 13 academic years, with a low number of four in AY 1999 and a peak of 24 internships in AY 2008. Factors influencing internships included the community, university, internship program criteria, national events, and sociological makeup. These factors are discussed as they relate to this research.

Research Model

We propose to demonstrate a relationship between after-graduation careers and college internships. Past research explored internship relationships with the retail industry,

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fashion merchandising curriculum, apprenticing, mentoring, career development, job satisfaction, and job preparation. No research study was found that studied a graduate's current job and their undergraduate internship. This research model compared the type of undergraduate internship to the graduate's current employment.

The fashion merchandising faculty at this university questioned the importance of a required internship for credit in the curriculum. The researchers were aware that southern families believe that "their children could leave for a short time, but they have to come home." They were also concerned that the small community of retailers was in constant need of

minimum wage sales labor and that upward mobility in any retail firm was almost non-existent. Junior management experiences were often promised by area retailers, but in actuality students reported that their internship experience was sales. There was a discrepancy in what a retail supervisor thought was managerial experience and what the students and faculty recognized as management experience.

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Methodology

This research study examined the relationship of the college internship and the graduate's current job. Many questions were formed, such as: Is the local internship as valuable as a non-local internship with regard to current job placement? Does it matter what the internship experience by store type is regarding the current job? Did it matter what national events were taking place that might have impacted the college internship placement? Did that have an effect on current job? Did students really immerse themselves in a fashion business during internship or were they just gaining college credits as required for their degree? Thorough analysis of the internship program components, internship placement, student, employer, faculty feedback, and statistical analysis of numbers gave insight to the impact of student internships and graduates' current jobs. The following research questions and hypotheses were developed based on existing literature review and researchers' questions about validity of the internship.

Questions and hypotheses to be tested.

Question 1: *Did the internship location (whether it was done locally in the community or away from the community, a non-local internship), affect the student's current job (are they currently in a fashion job or not)?*

H₁₀: Current employment in a fashion job is independent of internship location.

H_{1A}: Current employment in a fashion job is dependent on internship location.

Question 2: *Did the internship location (local or non-local) affect the location of the student's current job location?" Is the current job location local or non-local, regardless of whether that job is in fashion or not?*

H₂₀: Current local employment is independent of internship location.

H_{2A}: Current local employment is dependent on internship location.

Question 3: *Did the internship type (local department, local specialty, local boutique, or away) have a direct effect on whether you currently have a fashion job? Did the type of internship (local department store, local specialty store, local boutique store, or non-local any kind) influence current job type (local fashion job, local non-fashion job, non-local fashion job, non-local non-fashion job)?*

H_{30} : Current job is independent of internship type.

H_{3A} : Current job is dependent on internship type.

Question 4: *Did the internship term (fall, spring, or summer) affect the student's current job (fashion or non-fashion)?*

H_{40} : Current employment in a fashion job is independent of internship term (i.e., the distribution of fashion jobs is uniform over the semesters).

H_{4A} : Current employment in a fashion job is dependent on internship term. Did the term (fall, spring, or summer) that the students did their internship impact whether they currently have a fashion job.

Question 5: *Did the internship period have a direct effect on whether one currently has a fashion job? Is there a significant difference between Internship Period 1 (1998-2007) and Internship Period 2 (2009-2010) in terms of employment in fashion jobs?*

H_{50} : Current employment in a fashion job is independent of internship year.

H_{5A} : Current employment in a fashion job is dependent on internship year.

Research instrument and data collection. Internship placement records were kept for 13 years (1998-2010). Academic year and term (fall semester, spring semester, or summer term), and internship placement and location (local department store, local specialty store, local boutique, or non-local fashion business and location) were recorded. All fashion internship student graduates were contacted via email, texting, Facebook, Linked-in, Google, telephone, personal interview, and/or reference from alumni. Not all graduated students could be located and some students did not want to share their current job status. Student graduates' current job and location were recorded.

In the 13 year period of time (AY 1998-AY 2010) there were 169 internships. One hundred and eleven responses were ascertained yielding a 66% response rate. Contingency tables were made of all data and further separated into summarized frequency tables for each hypothesis. Chi square tests were applied to data for hypotheses 1-4 and a two proportion Z-test was applied to data for hypothesis 5.

Results and Discussion

The importance of a non-local internship. Of paramount importance was the questioning by the researchers as to whether a local internship was beneficial to students (questions/hypotheses 1, 2, 3). Other researchers have documented the importance and the benefits of an internship (Hegert, 2009; Knight, Crutsinger, & Kim, 2006; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008), but none have specifically addressed the benefits of a small town internship in regard to employment in the fashion field after graduation. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) posts annual reports on college graduates and businesses responses regarding employment and hiring practices. Reported in the 2012 survey of college graduates was that 55% had internships and of those 51% were offered a job (NACE, 2013).

Question 1: Is a local department, specialty, or boutique store internship experience more beneficial than a non-local any type internship experience with regards to a current job in fashion merchandising? Students in this study had boundaries for their internship: 1) The internship was required for the program degree with specific requirements and pre-requisites; 2) the student population was such that financially an in-town internship was deemed prudent; 3) the community had limited retail opportunities beyond sales jobs; 4) the university administration placed obstacles on faculty regarding internships that were passed on to students; and 5) national and regional events placed pressure on students to remain close to home.

Considering these boundaries, it was expected that the majority of student internships in this sample were done locally (92 out of 111 = 83%). This research sought to measure the benefits of the internship by assessing students employed in the fashion field. As Paulins stated (2008, p. 105), "An internship's objective is to prepare students for their future careers." Hegert (2009) found that students place a high value on the internship experience. Wesley and Bickle (2005) argued that the internship increases the probability of securing a full-time position upon graduation. The intent is that the future career, the value of the experience, and securing a job upon graduation will be in the degreed discipline.

College students' intern experiences impact their future job satisfaction and career intentions (Knight, Crustinger, & Kim 2006). Students want emotional satisfaction from

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their work experiences and supervisory support. Educators can serve as a conduit between student interns and their supervisors by aiding emotional satisfaction and providing support. While weekly interaction occurred between student intern and faculty supervisor, the university could not demand that the work supervisor change their actions or activities. A student performed as his or her supervisor demanded, which usually was to increase sales.

Test on Null Hypothesis 1: Current employment in a fashion job is independent of internship location. To test H_{10} against H_{1A} , a chi-square test was used on a 2 X 2 contingency table. Out of 92 local internships 32 were currently in fashion jobs (32/92= 0.3478). Out of 19 non-local internships 15 were currently in fashion jobs (15/19= 0.7895). The P value of the test = 0.0003895, substantiating that a current job in fashion is impacted by the location of the internship. There was a high probability that non-local internship students were currently in fashion jobs. Local internships yielded fewer current fashion careers than did non-local internships (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Chi Square Analysis of Internship Location versus Type of Current Job

Current 2012 Job Type			
Internship Location	Fashion Job	Non Fashion Job	Row Total
Local	32	60	92
Nonlocal	15	4	19
Column Total	47	64	111

P value = 0.0003895

Question 2: Is internship location (local or non-local) impacting current job location (local or non-local)? Although students reported on their internship journals, papers, and oral presentations how well they liked their fashion merchandising internship they found employment in the community after graduation to be scarce. The boutiques that hired them for internship had a low pay scale and a flat organizational chart. Many of the boutiques were owner-managed with less than three employees. There was no upward growth or mobility for student graduates. Graduates tended to remain in the community, therefore limiting their fashion retailing career opportunities.

Test on Null Hypothesis 2: Current local employment is independent of internship location. To test H_{20} against H_{2A} , a chi-square test was used on a 2 X 2 contingency table. Out of 92 local internships 70 are currently employed in the local community (70/92= 0.7609). Out of 19 non-local internships 9 are currently employed in the local community (9/19= 0.4737). The P value of the test = 0.01187, substantiating that current employment is impacted by the location of the internship. H_{20} is rejected and the alternative hypothesis H_{2A} is accepted. Internship location does impact employability at the local level. There is a greater likelihood that non-local internship students are currently employed outside the local community. Local internships yield local jobs, but not necessarily in fashion. Out of 92 local internships 60 are in non-fashion local jobs (65%) and 32 are in local fashion jobs (35%). Students remain in the area whether or not they obtain employment in the fashion field (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Chi Square Analysis of Internship Location versus Current 2012 Job Location

Internship Location	Current 2012 Job Location		Row Total
	Local	Nonlocal	
Local	70	22	92
Nonlocal	9	10	19
Column Total	79	32	111

P value = 0.01187

Question 3: *Is a local department, specialty, or boutique store internship experience more beneficial than a non-local any type internship experience with regards to a current job in fashion merchandising?* In Paulins' (2008) study a major differential factor between store-based internships and other site types was the level of variety of tasks offered in the experience. Store-based interns indicated significantly less tendency than others (corporate headquarters or other internships such as stylists, sales representatives, fashion offices) to recommend their location types to other students. Store-based internships are less likely than other internship sites to be associated with job characteristics that produce satisfaction. The majority of internships in this study were local, store-based internships.

Test on Null Hypothesis 3: To test H_{30} against H_{3A} , a chi-square test was used on a 2 X 4 contingency table with 3 degrees of freedom. The P value of the test is 0.0001045, indicating that the internship location influences the current job. Non-local interns had a higher probability of currently holding fashion jobs in non-local locations. Local interns had a higher probability of currently holding non-fashion jobs in the local community (see Table 3). If a local internship at a department, specialty, or boutique store was acquired it fell short of the rigor of an out-of-town, non-local internship, whether that non-local internship was in a store, in a showroom, or of some other nature. This finding helped substantiate Paulins' (2008) study that *other* types of internships were more satisfying to students.

Table 3.

Chi Square Analysis of Internship Location versus Current 2012 Job Type and Location

Current 2012 Job Type and Location					
Internship Location	Fashion Local Job	Fashion Nonlocal Job	Non Fashion Local Job	Non Fashion Nonlocal Job	Row Total
Local Department Store	4	3	5	2	14
Local Specialty Store	8	3	21	3	35
Local Boutique Store	10	4	22	7	43
Nonlocal Store	5	10	4	0	19
Column Total	27	20	52	12	111

P value = 0.0035, df = 9

The importance of an internship with regard to term, faculty, and administration.

Another issue of importance to the researchers was whether summer internships were more valuable than academic year internships. Also questioned was did enforcing criteria of the internship make a difference in students' jobs after graduation? Hypothesis four and five addressed the answering of these questions.

Question 4: *Did the fall, spring, or summer term in which an internship was experienced effect whether the students' current job would be in fashion merchandising?* Previous research in the field documents that internship activities can be categorized into the five types of visual merchandising, selling, inventory management, buying related, and education (Burgess 2005). In this research study students predominantly participated in selling activities. These researchers posed the same question as Burgess, as to whether employers are providing a true internship or do they view student interns as a means of free or cheap labor? These researchers thought that a local internship done during the fall and spring semesters would probably be just a sales job, in reality. Stretch and Harp (1991) concluded their research study with the question of whether the academic community will view internships as a potential differential advantage or a time-consuming, problematic endeavor. These researchers reiterated the thought, "Was there an advantage to a student in their future career if that internship was local?"

Test on Null Hypothesis 4: To test H_{40} against H_{4A} , a chi-square test was used on a 3 X 2 contingency table. Out of 28 fall term internships 8 were currently in fashion jobs ($8/28 = 0.2857$). Out of 43 spring term internships 16 were currently in fashion jobs ($16/43 = 0.3721$). Out of 40 summer term internships 23 were currently in fashion jobs ($23/40 = 0.5750$). The statistical value of the chi-square was 6.4034 with 2 degrees of freedom, producing a p-value of 0.0407 (see Table 4). At the 5% level of significance this small p-value rejects the null hypothesis in favor of the hypothesis. A current job in fashion is dependent on the term of the internship. Summer interns landed in fashion jobs at a higher proportion. Most fall and spring internships were done locally and those graduates were less likely to be in fashion careers compared to summer interns. Most summer internships were done non-locally and were more likely to be in fashion careers.

Table 4.

Chi Square Analysis of Internship Semester versus Current 2012 Job Type

Internship Semester	Current 2012 Job Type		Row Total
	Fashion Job	Non Fashion Job	
Fall	8	20	28
Spring	16	27	43
Summer	23	17	40
Column Total	47	64	111

P value = 0.0407, df = 2

Question 5: *Did the year in which an internship was experienced effect whether the students' current job would be in fashion merchandising?* Changes were made to the internship program over the 13 years that were studied. Some changes were minor (increase GPA from 2 to 2.5; add a course pre-requisite); but there was a major difference in 2008 when internship faculty changed and demands were made that internships be more than sales jobs. Students were also strongly urged to obtain internships outside of the community and administration paid faculty to teach summer internships. Internship frequencies were grouped into 2 periods indicative of before and after the substantial changes.

Period 1 included years 1998-2008. This period of internships was relatively of the same nature. Internships were offered every semester and students usually found a local internship. The internship faculty mentor supervised fall and spring interns as an unpaid overload. If a student did a summer internship, they were on their own without any supervision, correspondence, or follow-up. AY 2008 was a transition year when internship changed. There were 58 interns in period 1, and 18 graduates are currently employed in the fashion field ($18/58 = 0.3103$).

Period 2 included years 2009-2010. During this period of internship supervision was considered part of the faculty load in the spring semester (fall internship was no longer offered), summer internship supervision was paid, students were urged to consider out

of community internships, the criteria of no sales jobs for credit was enforced. There were 32 interns in period 2, and 23 graduates were currently employed in the fashion field ($23/32=0.71888$).

Students often reported to college supervisors that what was promised as an internship activity did not materialize once on the job.

Students often reported to college supervisors that what was promised as an internship activity did not materialize once on the job. Students and faculty coordinators were told that students would have the opportunity to learn buying functions and work with vendors, only to find out that the store needed sales help. There appeared to be a misunderstanding of terms between the local fashion businesses and the university. This university faced the question of whether the internship practice was a means of strengthening community relations between the university and businesses. Also questioned, were the internships just a disguise for obtaining sales help.

Test on Null Hypothesis 5: To test H_{50} against H_{5A} , a two proportion Z-Test was applied to the data testing the equality of two population proportions. Interns were grouped by academic year into period 1 or period 2. Population 1 was the number of internships in current 2012 fashion jobs in the time period 1: 1998-2007. Population 2 was the number of internships in current 2012 fashion jobs in the time period 2: 2008-2010. The P-value of testing H_{50} against H_{5A} is 0.000196, rendering the null hypothesis unacceptable. Period 1 was significantly different than Period 2. There was a greater likelihood that students would be in fashion jobs if they had an internship with more stringent criteria as maintained in Period 2 internships (see Table 5). Internships with more vigor, specifically larger firms with varied responsibilities, were predominant since 2008. Those internships had a greater impact on current jobs in fashion compared to those before 2008.

Table 5.

Two Proportion Z – Test of Equality of Two Population Proportions

Academic Year Of Internship	Number of Interns Per Academic Year	Number of Graduates in Current 2012 Fashion Jobs
1998	5	2
1999	3	1
2000	5	0
2001	6	2
2002	5	0
2003	3	1
2004	4	0
2005	9	6
2006	7	3
2007	11	3
2008	21	6
2009	14	11
2010	18	12
Total	111	47
Percent of Total		42%

$P = 0.000196$

Limitations and Conclusions

There were 169 students in internship over a 13 year period. This study was limited to a sample of 111 of those students (66%). Fewer students responded from the early years of the study. College students' internships impacted their current employment. This research study posed five questions regarding fashion merchandising internships and all five questions were answered with extremely high statistical validity.

A fashion merchandising college internship in larger cities provides graduates jobs in fashion. Students that intern non-locally presumably receive more varied experiences, better training and preparation and perhaps are more motivated to continue in fashion retailing careers. Interns that met the stringent requirements of junior management

(skills and duties beyond sales clerks) and were in larger cities were more likely to currently be employed in fashion careers. When students chose larger markets and retailers their opportunities for advancement increased.

Those students electing to have a local internship regardless whether that job was in a department, specialty, or boutique store, tend to remain in the local area in various types of jobs, not necessarily a fashion merchandising job.

Those students electing to have a local internship regardless whether that job was in a department, specialty, or boutique store, tend to remain in the local area in various types of jobs, not necessarily a fashion merchandising job. Most students in this study lived within 100 miles of the university and were

very family-oriented. The social culture and norm for this region is for students to live near their parents and family. This norm is then demonstrated in their careers with 71% of students in this study currently employed within 100 miles of the university.

Summer internship experiences for the students studied were more likely to be currently employed in fashion careers. One distinct advantage of students completing internships in the summer is that they are not enrolled in other classes and have more time for concentrating on a career culture at the intern site. Understanding the sociological makeup of an internship program's student enrollment and the community's resources specific to available retail experiences, pay, and upward mobility better afford a program to

correctly assess the viability of an internship program in their curriculum. Smaller communities' internships impact graduates' fashion careers negatively.

Understanding the sociological makeup of an internship program's student enrollment and the community's resources specific to available retail experiences, pay, and upward mobility better afford a program to correctly assess the viability of an internship program in their curriculum.

NACE reported in a 2012 Internship and Co-op Survey (2013) that for the past 5 years that a job offer rate converting interns to permanent employees has decreased. Of the 280 businesses comprising the survey, 218 firm names were identified. Of those businesses reporting on recruiting and hiring interns, only two were fashion retail businesses, Macy's and Sear's. The quality of the internship impacts the employment of a college

graduate in the fashion field. If students obtain their fashion retail internship in a small town they are less likely to be employed in fashion than those obtaining internships non-locally, in larger cities and corporations offering more vigorous (non-sales) fashion merchandising experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study reinforced the need for more research to better understand the importance of a required fashion merchandising internship in smaller markets and how it influences academic and career achievement. Replication studies are warranted at other mid-sized universities in same-size cities to determine whether those internships yield the same results. Another possibility for future research would be the study of internships in different disciplines. The fashion merchandising internship may be decidedly different than an accounting, computer, or science-related internship.

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