

*Full Length Research*

## **Internships Pay Off, Even if Unpaid: Public Health Graduates Well-Equipped to Enter Workforce**

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An academic internship is a three-way partnership among an institution of higher education, the internship site, and the student. Internships play an irreplaceable role in academia by providing students hands-on learning opportunities, allowing them to collaborate with faculty, and strengthening ties between colleges and their communities (Westerberg and Wickersham, 2011). The current study's use of alumni data collected via the internet and emails, to investigate the impact of students' academic internships on their professional life after college. Specifically, this study focuses on how the internship experience may have impacted students' career path after college, along with how equipped students were to enter the workforce upon graduation. Results indicate that over the last 7 years, approximately 70% of public health graduates are working in health-related jobs, 21% obtained their first job from their internship site; 28.5% are currently or have pursued advanced degrees; and half of the 16% that are employed in non-health related jobs, are working in fields related to their degree. In light of the debate regarding educational value vs. financial aspects of the academic internship, results from this study help illustrate the invaluable experience that can result from a properly developed and implemented academic internship experience.

**Keywords:** Academic Internships; Assessment; Public Health Program; Health-Related Careers; College Graduates.

### **INTRODUCTION**

An academic internship is a three-way partnership among an institution of higher education, the internship site, and the student. Internships play an irreplaceable role in academia by providing students hands-on learning opportunities, allowing them to collaborate with faculty, and strengthening ties between colleges and their communities (Westerberg & Wickersham, 2011). These authors posit that internships are definitely worth it regardless of whether or not students are getting paid. The article concludes by stating that "carefully conceived, academically informed internships provide that kind of added value—a good return on the investment of the students' energy, intelligence, and time, whether or not they are paid." However, while the benefit of an

Academic Internship is most often undeniable, the debate over the financial aspects surrounding has been a controversial topic of debate. Given the financial aspects intertwined within the internship experience, colleges and the Labor Department are often on opposite sides of the fence when it comes to how they should be compensated. This discrepancy is illustrated by the first of the six criteria set forth in the Labor Department's memo clarifying the government's position under the Fair Labor Standards Act: "To qualify as a legitimately unpaid internship, the position must provide instruction that "is similar to training which would be given in an educational environment."

Along with various financial aspects of internships

(Ross, April 2, 2011), other administrative concerns are starting to creep into the debate regarding internships. In today's world of academia, program and student assessment has become as much of a staple as course syllabi. Specifically, are internships essential learning tools or can they be optional or replaced by an additional class. Thus, the value of the academic internship is being questioned and the ability to assess the impact of internship is being requested. In a time when institutions are faced with skyrocketing administrative cost and students with rising tuition bills and mounting student loans, measures of internship assessment are sought to solidify their value. The future survival of this partnership among an institution of higher education, the internship site, and the student may in part, rest upon the ability to quantify its worth; the rationale for this current study was exactly this case. Over the last decade, administrations call for faculty to assess and document curriculum and student learning has been a priority in academia. This study was conducted as a result of administrations' request. Administration requested data to validate the need for a required academia internship and to provide implications of such an experience on students' learning and career path after graduation. Specifically, the study poses the following two research questions: "Is the internship process pivotal in the success of students' careers in health-related fields after they graduate"; and second, "Do internships, along with program curriculum, adequately prepare students to enter the workforce in health-related fields and / or health-related graduate programs."

### Assessment

According to Walvoord (2010), by definition "assessment is the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions that affect student learning"(p. 2). In a more simplistic understanding, it is a way to measure the effectiveness of the course being taught and the methods of doing so; or as a whole – an academic program. It holds the purpose to constantly improve instructing methods and student learning. A recent study conducted by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (Glenn, 2011) discovered that there was an evident difference in the types of assessment depending on the academic program. The types of assessment considered in their study were as followed; locally developed, licensure, and standardized exams; alumni and employer surveys; student interviews or focus groups; capstone courses; culminating projects or demonstrations; and portfolios. Assessment, in its various forms, has become a standardized tool to continuously evaluate and re-evaluate instructional methods and student learning. Thus, given the internship may be one of academia's

most valuable learning experiences, it's reasonable to question how this may be validated.

The current study uses alumni data in order to assess the impact of student internships on students' career path after college, along with program assessment on how equipped students are to enter the workforce after graduation. Specifically, are internships pivotal in the success of students' careers after they graduate and do these internships, along with program curriculum, adequately prepare students to enter the workforce in health-related fields? This study investigates this topic in hopes to add valuable information into the debate of academic internships and their value in the student learning process.

### Public Health Academic Internship

"Professor, I need to speak with you, it's urgent"; "Professor, I am freaking out, I need help"; or "Professor, I am so confused, I am completely lost where to even start." Frazzled seniors, frantically trying to schedule appointments with me is a scenario I encounter way too often. Students seek me out in my office, the hallways, and before or after class in a desperate fact finding mission regarding the too often dreaded required internship. Many students are so bogged down by the logistics of the internships; they lose sight of the long-term value on this experience. Who? What? Where? When? and Why? are being fired at me so fast, sometimes I feel like I am the target of my children's Nerf gun wars. In addition, students' schedules are already so jammed packed with work, classes, sports, activities and social life that fitting in an academic internship seems about as realistic to them as a day without their iPhone."

The transition from traditional "classroom learning" as a student to the world of "internships learning" is not always easy and can bear a lot of difficulties. Students have to adapt to a new working world when they enter their internship and struggle between the ability to apply their theoretical knowledge to a work-related context while learning a new organizational culture. Academic internships are defined as an opportunity to integrate work-related experience into graduate education by participating in scheduled and supervised work (Gault, Leach & Duly, 2010). These real-world experiences are an integral component of an academic program and provide students with the opportunity to develop not only work skills but also an understanding of the workplace (Gerken, Rienties, Giesbers & Könings, 2012). However, before assessment of an internship experience can be addressed, defining it needs to be clear.

An internships experience, due to its very nature, is as

**Table 1:** Internship Description

**Internship Description:** Public Health undergraduates at a mid-size liberal arts college have the opportunity to complete a 200-300 hour (4-6 credits) internship experience before graduation. All Public Health majors are required to take the Internship / Fieldwork course. This course is a traditional internship with an additional classroom element to expose students to both fieldwork and a “senior-capstone” experience geared towards starting a career in the field of Public Health. Students are responsible for obtaining an internship and should do so one semester before anticipating enrolling in the internship. In choosing a site that would complement their interests, students should consider the following:

- a). the setting in which he/she would like to work;
- b). the health issue in which he/she are most interested; and
- c). the population group with which he/she would like to work. During this time, students, under the supervision of an Internship Director, secure a site and proceed to complete their on-site hours, while meeting as a class several times throughout the semester (See Appendix A for Semester Schedule).

different as the disciplines in which students are obtaining their major and the institution in which they are attending. In support, The National Association of Colleges and Employers has found that only 28 percent of colleges associate classroom experience with academic credit for internships, while 25 percent do not require any kind of written assignments, 15 percent do not require any faculty supervision, and 6 percent require nothing at all (as cited in Ross, April 24, 2011).. In addition, the study reports that university policies on credit vary widely with respect to internships, study abroad, and coursework at other accredited institutions, and the value of their credits are more highly guarded by elite college versus more permissive institutions. Thus, given that academic internship experiences vary on many different levels, to better understand the current internship experience, the following description, requirements and evaluations are provided. Table 1

As clearly stated above, work-based learning, in the form of internships is a valuable educational tool. However, the design and implementation of the internship experience can make or break this experience. As stated in study by Narayanan, Olk, and Fukami (2010) the quality of internship learning heavily depends on the quality of feedback and supervision by both the company and the business schools. In order to enhance the learning experience of students while at internships, both companies and schools have to find a way to effectively support, facilitate, and supervise students while they take and complete their internship. The College’s (name taken out for blind review) Public Health Internship Program has created and implemented a fieldwork experience that has the potential to provide a win-win opportunity for all three parties in the internship process (institute of higher education, internship sites and students). Evaluation on this process will provide data to indicate the following:

RQ1: Is the internship process pivotal in the success of students’ careers in health-related fields after they graduate; and

RQ2: Do internships, along with program curriculum, adequately prepare students to enter the workforce in health-related fields and / or health-related graduate programs

## METHODOLOGY

In the fall of 2007, at a mid-size liberal arts college on the east coast, the Public Health Program was approximately 65 students, a rather small program. However, over the years as the college grew, so did the Public Health Program. By Fall of 2013, the Public Health Program, with a faculty of four, had almost 250 majors, with five different tracks (Health Administration, Community Health Education, Environmental Health, Pre-Occupational Therapy and Pre-Physical Therapy) and sustainability had become a serious issue. One recommendation from administration was eliminating the demands of the internship or at least changing it from a mandatory requirement to an elective. Given the invaluable nature of the internship, neither of these was an appealing option. Hence, a way to quantify the worth of the internship was imperative.

Since Fall 2007, the Public Health Program has offered undergraduate students the opportunity to engage in internship / fieldwork experience (described in previous section) prior to graduating. Between Fall 2007 and Fall 2014, 240 students have participated in the internship class and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Public Health. A list of students names were obtained from class rosters creating a sampling frame. From this sampling frame, information from 189 students was obtained.

Over the course of a year, 189 Public Health majors were tracked down using a network sampling approach. Two major data collection procedures were employed. First, with the use of the internet and social media such as LinkedIn and Facebook, alumni demographics were obtained. Specifically, acquired data included the following variables: alumni job titles and companies, graduate school information and contact information. This

data was entered into a spread sheet to illustrate and calculate frequencies of jobs and graduate schools.

A second data collection procedure was through emails. Emails were sent out to alumni through Facebook, LinkedIn, emails addresses provided by alumni offices and students prior to graduation and a Public Health Society Facebook page. These emails acquired data included the following variables: 1. current employment and past employment since graduation; 2. any additional schooling or certificates they have obtained since graduation; 3. location of their internship and did it result in a job offer; and 4. Did alumni feel that their internship was a benefit to their employment after graduation. The email clearly stated why the information was being solicited and whether or not students would have any problem with the information they provided being shared publically. Not one participate had a problem or concern with the sharing the information they provided in their email.

Out of the 189 Public Health Alumni in the study, demographic on approximately 60 percent were obtained through Social Media sites and therefore, are missing qualitative data. Therefore, alumni data for all 189 students provides demographics on these individuals; some more comprehensive than others. For example, there may be individuals that have their job title listed on Facebook or LinkedIn, but are also attending graduate school and vice versa. Thus, although each alumnus on the list has at least one demographic listed for him / her, others may have several. In addition, although each of the alumni was sent an email via these sites or from a list of email address, some emails were responded to and some were not. Thus, contact information is not available for all participants. Therefore, information for these alumni may be missing or incomplete. In addition, information regarding the value of the internship experience was only obtained from alumni responding to the email and answering question number 4. However, internship sites for each of the alumni were available from when they were enrolled in the course. Examples of this qualitative data from question number four are provided below to illustrate the quantitative data obtained via both the websites and emails.

## RESULTS

In order to provide administration with meaningful assessment data of not only students' internship experience, but program assessment as well, a total sample of 189 alumni was obtained. Basic descriptive statistics provide the following information from these alumni to help better understand the pivotal role that internships played in their career path after college, along with how prepared they were to enter the workforce. In addition, qualitative data is also provided to illustrate the quantitative data and student responses. Finally, a list of

companies and job titles are provided to showcase alumni job placement.

Research Question #1 explores whether or not the internship process is pivotal in the success of students' careers in health-related fields after they graduate. Basic statistics indicate the following about participants' career path after graduation: 130 / 189 (68.7%) - working in Health Related Fields; 40/189 (21%) - 1st job hired from Internship; 54/189 (28.5 %) - Graduate Programs; and 30/189 (16%) - Employed in non-health related fields; 15/30 jobs using college degree.

First, data obtained from alumni provides us insight into not only life after college for our students, but how life in college has played a role. Specifically, 21% of our students' first jobs after graduation came directly from the sites where they interned:

"Dear Professor; Hope all is well, it's been quite the roller coaster ride since graduating, but thankfully all for the better. My internship was with the Southern Shore Chapter of the American Red Cross where I shadowed the Disaster Program Specialist for Atlantic & Cape May counties. I would assist her with Sandy recovery efforts, disaster victim relief (from house fires, flooding, etc.), and attend volunteer meetings. A few months after graduating, the Disaster Specialist position became available and since I was already trained in the functions of the office and had a rapport with the volunteers, I was contacted to see if I was interested in the position. Now, I operate as the Disaster Program Specialist for both counties."

"I graduated back in the spring and I did my internship with BAYADA Home Health Care in the Linwood visits office. After applying to a few different BAYADA locations around New Jersey, I was hired as an Associate at the North Brunswick office. I used a lot of the professionals I work with at my internship as my professional references in order to be hired for this position. My internship really showed me what BAYADA was all about and led me to want to work with the company."

"Without my internship there would have been no possible way I would have obtained this job position. Your internship truly is a 16 week job interview and should be treated as an interview. I can't emphasize enough how important internships are and how my internship experience really benefited me in many different aspects of my current job."

In addition, many other students commented that even though they did not get hired by their internship, the

**Table 2:** Graduate Program Data

<u>Graduate Programs</u>	<u>Certifications</u>
1. Occupation Therapy – 16 graduates	<b>CHES</b> (Certified Health Education Specialist) – 8 graduates
2. Physical Therapy – 11 students	<b>REHS:</b> Registered Health Specialist – 3 graduates
3. Nursing – 11 graduates	<b>Certified Assisted Living Administrator</b> – 1 graduate
4. Masters Programs	
• Counseling	
• Criminal Justice	
• Business Administration	
• Health Administration	
• MPH (3)	
• Nutrition (2)	
• Social Work (3)	
5. Medical School (2)	
6. Chiropractic School	
7. Beauty School	

experience: 1. was a key factor in getting their first job; 2. helped them network to get their first job; and 3. provided professional references that helped them get their first job. The following alumni comment highlights the above:

“I am a student that graduated from the public health program in May. I am thrilled to let you know that I have received a job at the County of Cape May Department of Health. I am doing outreach under their Cancer Education and Early Detection grant, and will be working under their Family Planning Grant starting in January. “College name” gave me the necessary tools to get the job. I was able to make the right connections through my internship at Cape Regional Medical Center.”

Research Question #2 investigates whether internships, along with program curriculum, adequately prepares students to enter the workforce in health-related fields and / or health-related graduate programs. Results reveals that 28.5% of our students are currently attending or have completed graduate schools, top degrees: Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Nursing and Master’s degrees in various disciplines. The following is a detail account of the Graduate Programs and Certificates of these alumni. Table 2

Student comments also support that for many, internships played a role in deciding to further their academic career.

“I finished the public health program at “College Name” in fall 2010 and was immediately hired at

Atlanti Care Health Engagement (where I completed my internship for the program). I feel that my ability to get a job so quickly after graduating is definitely a testament to the fantastic education and preparation I received as a public health student at “College Name”. I worked for Atlanti Care for a year, passed the CHES exam, and then decided to go back to school for clinical nutrition and dietetics, in hopes of becoming a registered dietitian. Working at Atlanti Care gave me plenty of opportunities to shadow dietitians in clinical and non-clinical settings, as well as at Atlanti Care's outpatient diabetes center, which further solidified my interest in the field. I entered a post-bachelor nutrition program (known in the nutrition field as a Didactic Program in Dietetics, or DPD) at Montclair State University and sought employment at the school's office of Health Promotion. I was hired as a student assistant and have been working for Health Promotion for the past two years while I've finished my DPD courses. My title recently changed to health promotion supervisor and I am currently finishing up my last three courses in my program!”

“I am currently beginning pre-med courses for my masters in human nutrition. I'll be applying for the fall 2015 program at Drexel University for human nutrition. My hope is to have my registered dietician license at the end of the program. I also wanted to update you on my internship turned job... I left Green Street after managing for 6 months. It was on good

terms and I still shop there! Thanks to the internship I now have Manager on my resume. It was a very rewarding experience and I learned so much.”

Finally, and maybe most impressive, almost 70% of our alumni are working in health-related fields putting both their classroom knowledge and hands-on experience to practice. In addition, half of the students working in non-related health fields are still working in jobs where they are applying knowledge and skills obtained from their undergraduate degree.

The PUBH program is a great program that helps students become well rounded and prepared to take on a variety of roles in the job market after graduating. It is well worth any student's time to intern while in school. It is the best way for a student to gain insight into a business and gives the student a tremendous opportunity to be hired or considered for future employment. I am extremely fortunate to have found fulltime employment working at Bayada. After graduating school and waiting 4 months I was finally accepted into Bayada's Associate Leadership Development Program. This 6 month program is an accelerated training program that prepares an associate for management at Bayada within a few years. Without my internship there would have been no possible way I would have obtained this job position. Your internship truly is a 16 week job interview and should be treated as an interview. I can't emphasize enough how important internships are and how my internship experience really benefited me in many different aspects of my current job.”

“I currently handle all the recruiting and compliance for the office. I LOVE my job and feel so grateful that “College Name” was able to assist me with this career change. If there is anything you need please let me know. You were always wonderful. About offering more specific tracks in PUBH, I definitely think this is a great idea and that the students would benefit from this. The internship prepares students for the real world. That's something you cannot learn in the classroom. By doing my internship, I realized that occupational therapy wasn't for me. The education that “College Name” provided, especially in the Public Health program, helped me rediscover my passion for life. I loved the program and I am happy to hear that it is growing so more students can benefit from it.”

In addition, many times students cited that the internship was pivotal in “kick-starting” their career. Below is a list of almost 90 companies and job titles where alumni are employed. Table 3

## DISCUSSION

Through the use of alumni data collected via the internet and emails, the current study investigates the impact of students' academic internships on their professional life after college. Specifically, the study focuses on how the internship experience may have impacted students' career path after college, along with how equipped students were to enter the workforce upon graduation. In light of the educational value vs. financial aspects of the academic internship, results from this study help to illustrate the invaluable experience that can result from a properly developed and implemented internship experience. Results provide answers to both research questions and indicate support for the internship process in preparing students for life after college; the following provides elaboration on these results.

Over the course of 7 years, alumni that participated in Public Health Internship Program were identified through social media sites and emails; data was obtained on 189 alumni. The main contribution of the study is that data posits that the internship for many students was pivotal in the success of students' health-related careers after graduation. Specifically, that 21% of alumni received their first job offer from their internships. These are impressive statistics, especially in the recent economic climate. Based on The Internships.com survey, conducted between Dec. 1 and Dec. 4, 2012, which polled more than 7,300 students and recent graduates, as well as over 300 human resources and recruitment professionals, results show 54% of recent graduates are unemployed or underemployed.

In addition, another important contribution of this study is that although alumni who did not receive job offers from their internship sites, did indicate that their internship was a key factor in getting their first job, helped them network to get their first job and provided professional references that helped them get their first job. These are factors that are critical in the job searching process. Results from the Internships.com study show that internships truly have become the “new interview” in the job search process for students and employers alike and the best chance students have not to be one of the unemployed, is to do an internship (Stuart Lander, chief marketing officer at Internships.com). Furthermore, since “Entry level employees are the future of a company and so, in many ways, the most important recruiting decisions an employer can make (Landers), the internship experience is beneficial in this process. As Smith (2012) states, not only undergraduate students land jobs through internships, but “they also get a chance to test-drive a

**Table 3:** List of Companies**Companies & Job Titles**

1. A Plus Care – Behavior Support Specialist
2. Alaris Health of Cherry Hill – Recreational Therapy Supervisor
3. Allies, Inc. – Assistant Supervisor
4. Ameri Health Insurance – Associate Account Executive
5. American Nephrology Nursing Association – Education Service Coordinator
6. Ancora Psychiatric Hospital
7. ARC – Program Assistant
8. Atlantic Adult Day Healthcare
9. Atlantic Care: approximately 12 graduates
10. Atlantic County Division of Public Health
11. Atlantic County Office of Emergency Preparedness - County EMS Coordinator
12. Atlantic Resource Prevention - (5 graduates)
13. Bankbridge Elementary School; 1:1 Aide
14. Barnabus Health Behavioral Health
15. Bayada: approximately 15 graduates
16. Biometric Screener for Health Advocate - Health Educator
17. Brandywine Senior Living - Move-in Coordinator,
18. Burlington & Camden YMCA – Public Health Program Coordinator
19. Burlington County Health Department
20. Cammack Health – Account Manager
21. Cape May County Health Department - Outreach Coordinator (under the NJCEED grant); Environmental Specialist
22. Capital Health Medical Center
23. CareStation Medical Group - Patient Care Coordinator
24. Department of Community Affairs – Case Manager
25. Dupont Hospital
26. Eagleview Health & Rehab
27. Environmental Services
28. Family Resources Network
29. Fox Rehabilitation - Clinical Operations Coordinator; Sales Support Specialist
30. Garden State Environmental Services – Industrial Hygienist
31. Healthy Woman OBGYN - Front Desk
32. HIV Services
33. Hope Health Care, Inc. – Operations Manager
34. Hybrid Health Care Communication – Account Coordinator
35. Integrated Medicine Alliance – IT Administration
36. Inspira Medical Center - School Based Program
37. Jewish Community Center Early Childhood
38. Jones Lang LaSalle on the Merck Account - Facilities Coordinator
39. Keystone Industries – QA/ Regulatory Associate; Environmental Health Specialist
40. Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation
41. LEA Environmental LLC - Industrial Hygienist/Marketing Manager
42. Lead and Healthy Homes - Health Educator
43. Marlton Rehabilitation
44. Maxim Healthcare Services - Healthcare Recruiter
45. Mental Health Association
46. Meridian Rehabilitation @ Neptune
47. Merwick Nursing Home
48. Ocean County Foot and Ankle Surgical Associate – Manager
49. Ocean County Public Health Department – Health Educator
50. Penn Medicine, Woodbury Heights NJ – Patient Service Representative
51. Pharmacy Services Representative

**Continuation of Table 3**

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|-----|---|
| 52. | Public County Health Department in Massachusetts – Public Health Officer                          |
| 53. | Red Cross, Pleasantville - Occupational Safety and Health Administration                          |
| 54. | Robert Wood Johnson Hospital – Patient Care Tech  |
| 55. | Row New York – School Program Director  |
| 56. | Salem County Public Health Department and Human Services – Environmental; Health Educator         |
| 57. | Seashore Gardens - Admissions Coordinator; other positions (4 graduates; 2 hired from internship) |
| 58. | Shore Medical Center – Patient Access Trainer   |
| 59. | SNAP ED – Rutgers Cooperative Extension – Health Educator; Marketing                              |
| 60. | South Jersey AIDS Alliance  |
| 61. | South Jersey Family Medical Center – OB Coordinator   |
| 62. | Southwest Council – Prevention Specialist   |
| 63. | Thomas Jefferson Hospital – Clinical Research Lab Coordinator                                     |
| 64. | <u>Thompson Healthcare &amp; Sports Medicine</u> - Rehabilitation Assistant                       |
| 65. | <u>TruCare Physical Therapy</u> - Office Manager; Licensed Massage Therapist                      |
| 66. | Twin Boro PT (Physical Therapy)   |
| 67. | University of Maryland – Environmental Health and Safety Officer                                  |
| 68. | Vancouver, Washington Hospital – Financial Counselor  |
| 69. | Vineland Public County Department of Health – REHS; Health Educator                               |
| 70. | <u>Virtua Health</u> – Approximately 6 graduates  |
| 71. | Water's Edge Healthcare & Rehabilitation Center   |
| 72. | Well Call – Health Educator   |

**Non-Health Companies**

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 1.  | American Institute Holding – Financial AID Advisor         |
| 2.  | Cornerstone - Professional Training and Coaching           |
| 3.  | Criminal Background Research – Marlton                     |
| 4.  | Dermatologist office – Administrative Assistant            |
| 5.  | Financial Service Professional                             |
| 6.  | Grimley Financial Insurance                                |
| 7.  | Harris School of Business – Instructor                     |
| 8.  | Lincoln Financial Group – Associate                        |
| 9.  | Liberty Mutual Insurance                                   |
| 10. | Lightspeed Research – Project Manager                      |
| 11. | Ocean County College – Accounting Department               |
| 12. | Rock the Aisle – Director of Marketing and Strategy        |
| 13. | Six Flags – Human Resource Representative                  |
| 14. | Teaching - Early Childhood Education; Substituted Teaching |
|     | Stockton University – Computer Services                    |

career before committing, while employers get the opportunity to find the talent they need to help grow their business without relying on just a short interview". In support, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education, when employers recently named the most important elements in hiring a recent graduate, college reputation, GPA, and courses finished at the bottom of the list, but outside experience of academics: Internships, jobs, volunteering, and extracurricular, were at the top of the list (Thompson, 2014).

Another contribution and important finding of the study to the field of health professionals is that almost 70% of graduates are working in health-related fields and out of the 16% that are employed in non-health related fields, half are still working in jobs that are applicable to their degree. The sheer number of alumni working in jobs

directly or indirectly relating to their undergraduate degree, is not only impressive, but strongly correlates with student preparedness to enter the workforce upon graduation. Qualitative data, from alumni emails, support claims that students were well equipped to enter the workforce after completing their Public Health degree. Specifically, alumni indicated their degree adequately prepared them to enter the job force and they possessed the knowledge, skills and experience to start building their career path.

In support of the current results, the Internships.com study found that 66% of employers believe interview performance and relevant work experience are the most important factors in their hiring decisions. Employers noted that an important factor when deciding who to hire is interview performance because they want to make sure

that the student will be a good fit for their organization. However, experience is also important, but that doesn't necessarily mean just previous internship or work experience. The employer noted that they look at what the student has been learning at school, relevant projects, course work and extracurricular activities.

In addition to being equipped to enter the workforce, data shows that alumni are also prepared and motivated to further their educational learning. Results indicate that just fewer than 30% of alumni are currently attending or completed graduate work. Data indicates that alumni are obtaining degrees in Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Nursing, and Master's degrees in a variety of disciplines. Many of these fields require advanced degrees and acceptance into their programs is extremely competitive (many schools choose only 30 students from over 200 to 600 applicants). Alumni's acceptance into these programs, also adds support to their preparedness. In addition, a small number of alumni applied and passed exams for certification in their areas of specialty. Students seeking certification, by both the mean of a CHES (Certified Health Education Specialist) and REHS (Registered Environmental Health Specialist), need to have completed specific class and fieldwork requirements during undergraduate degrees to be eligible.

This data contributes to the growing body of literature that supports academic internships. Student anxiety along with the time, effort and legal issues surrounding internships can certainly make them a taxing process; however, the benefits far outweigh the cost. Well developed internship programs that include strong communication lines between all three parties are vital to the success of these partnerships. In addition, assessment of internship experience is critical in highlighting the academic benefits, along with ensuring its survival in an ever-changing academic world. Hence, in the day of rising tuition, astronomical student loans and a less than desirable economic climate, both students and academic institutions are wise to remember that internships can be an extremely valuable investment that pays off in the long-run!

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## Appendix A for Semester Schedule

**Internship Requirements:** In order to fulfill the PUBH program requirements for a **Community Health Education Track**, a student needs to be involved in one or more of the following activities during his/her internship:

- a. development of educational program(s)
- b. implementation of educational program(s)
- c. evaluation of educational program(s)
- d. grant writing for health/health education services
- e. health counseling with supervision
- f. development of educational materials
- g. community needs assessment

**Health Administration Track**, a student must employ one or more of the following competencies during his/her internship:

- a. communication skills (written and verbal)
- b. computer or computation skills
- c. accounting or financial management
- d. grant writing
- e. marketing
- f. management or managerial skills
- g. planning (strategic, community-based, program)

**Environmental Health Track**, a student must employ one or more of the following competencies during his/her internship:

- a. General knowledge of the basic areas of environmental health (sanitation, risk assessment and management, occupational health, epidemiology, etc...) with a working knowledge of at least one area
- b. Basic investigative skills - The ability to formulate strategies for solving scientific problems
- c. The ability to carry out strategies for solving scientific problems
- d. An understanding of the principles and applications of modern investigative and regulatory tools.
- e. The ability to read, understand, and use scientific literature
- f. An awareness of the broader implications of environmental health issues (e.g., resource management, economic factors, and ecological considerations).
- g. The ability to work with others as part of a team to solve scientific problems

**Internship Evaluation:** Evaluation of the internship experience is based on the following:

### 1. Internship Site (50% of grade):

- **Hours:** completion of the specified number of internship hours
- **Site Supervisor Evaluation.**
- **Internship Portfolio - Sample of Student Work\*:** Students MUST include all the materials the student used, created, distributed, etc. during the internship, (include letters, educational materials, surveys, etc.). They may also include any samples of work that they completed during past work experience and / or coursework that will illustrate their knowledge and skills. This material will be presented as an e-portfolio using Adobe Pro.

Continuation of **Appendix A** for Semester Schedule**2. Administrative Duties (10% of grade):**

- **Bi-Weekly Reports:** Bi-Weekly reports will be filled out by the student and the site supervisor. It is the responsibility of the student to submit the Bi-Weekly Reporting Sheets to their site supervisor and, once completed, to the Internship Coordinator
- **E-mail update:** on the weeks that students do not meet with the Internship Coordinator, he/she is expected to e-mail the Internship Coordinator to update her on the internship and what projects / activities the student has been working on.
- **Student Evaluation of Internship Experience:** students complete at the end of the semester and submit in after their final presentation.

**3. Presentation (20% of grade):** At the end of the semester, you will be required to give a presentation highlighting your internship experience. Presentation will last approximately 8-10 minutes and should illustrate the skills you acquired during your internship as well and the pros and cons of your fieldwork experience.**4. Additional Material in Internship Portfolio (20% of grade):**

- **Summary Paper:** a 5 page written summary of the entire internship experience that gives the student's personal reaction to the experience, evaluates his/her strengths weaknesses, positive and negative aspects of the internship. This summary paper must include a detailed discussion about how well the student was academically prepared for his or her internship. In other words, how well did the classroom experience prepare the student for the various tasks assigned during the internship? The student should be as specific as possible (i.e. citing specific opportunities or examples where they were able to apply what they have learned in class or were able to learn something new during the internship).
- **Resume, Cover Letter, References, and Thank You Letter:** Students should create the above items for future job search. The cover letter could be for a real or hypothetical job that you are/will be applying for. Thank you letter could be for an interview you have recently been on, or could be to your internship site supervisor (sending him/her a copy is highly recommended).