Internship Experience: The MMMAPS, the WorST, and the Interns

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Abstract

Undergraduate internship is the first access of students in the world of work that is why it is worth investigating what student-interns' experiences are. In this regard, the researchers delved into the alignment of the internship tasks given to Bachelor of Arts in Communication seniors in one prime state university toward their career trajectories anchored on CMO number 35, series of 2017 as required by the Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines, and the hurdles that they experienced in their internship deployment. By employing Qualitative Content Analysis of diary entries of thirty-two (32) interns from March 14, 2022, to May 13, 2022, in thirty-one (31) host offices, the following themes surfaced. The career trajectories are expressed in "MMMAPS" which stands for Media practitioner, Multimedia designer, Marketing assistant, administrative assistant, public information officer, and Social science researcher, while the hurdles are pegged as "WorST" which means Work-related, Student-related, and Task-related hurdles. There were loopholes in the deployment of the interns. Consequently, implications for practice are extrapolated to fully target the listed goals for students when they graduate.

Keywords: career trajectories, hurdles, internship experience, CMO number 35, series of 2017

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of internship as a kind of hands-on education is to introduce students to real-world situations and procedures while reinforcing what they learned in the traditional classroom (Barbarash, 2016; Jawabri, 2017; Ripamonti et al., 2018). Hardie (2018) espoused that successful undergraduate internship programs often depend on the effectiveness and design of the university programs, the dedication of students, and the commitment made by the host organizations.

A great number of studies have put the benefits of internship in the fore. The findings of Anjum (2020) show that internship programs have an influence on students' personal growth, skills, and capacities. In particular, researchers explicated that internship results in creative thinking, local and global interpersonal communication, problem-solving skills, the ability to create value, the capacity for accountability, the establishment of professional networks, having an open-mind, a boost in their capacity and confidence in choosing a career path, among others (Chen & Gan, 2021; Ivana, 2019; Koo et al., 2016; Schnoes et al., 2018). Sahrir et al. (2016) and Saltikoff (2017) pointed out that universities began to include internship training as a component of their study plans because of the need to be employable. In this regard, researchers discovered compelling evidence that industry-relevant internship experience significantly improves undergraduate students' employability (Nunley et al., 2016; Wang & Lee, 2019) because they are aware of duties, skills, and competencies that employers want them to do at work (Kapareliotis et al., 2019; Miralles-Quirós & Jerez-Barroso, 2018). Furthermore, the findings of Jung and Lee (2017) demonstrate that completing internship improved work performance, reduced the time it took to secure employment, and increased pay and job satisfaction. If fortunate, some internships result in full-time jobs at the same company or organization (Dommeyer et al., 2016).

Undeniably, much can be reaped in internship, but the experience is without its cruxes. According to Silva et al. (2018), one concern is the professional integration of graduates into the labor market and the construction of institutional mechanisms to ease students' transition from higher education to the workforce. Another is that colleges and universities have come under fire for encouraging undergraduate students to participate in internships while paying little attention to factors like pay, standard of supervision, and type of work involved (McHugh, 2017). Sahrir (2016) added that training undergraduate students in critical information and abilities connected to the job and their acquired knowledge is imperative because interns face problems in expressing their thoughts, creating technical reports, capacity to solve problems, analytical abilities, self-management, effective use of ICT, interpersonal skills, teamwork, creative thinking, self-confidence, assertiveness, and desire to learn (Bist et al., 2020; Dommeyer et al., 2016; Sawani et al., 2016). Next, Amin et al. (2020) noted that the time-allotment for internship is inadequate. Assessment of interns also came out as a roadblock in the internship experience. FengYan (2020) remarked that practical issues with the internship assessment system used in universities are unclear aims of the system, lack of openness in the process, absence of process records, and ineffective and time-consuming collection of data.

Context of the Study and Research Questions

Internship experience to prepare pools of professionals in the Philippines has been a significant goal in higher education institutions, and students generally have great experiences during their internships with the way degree programs are run (Carrido et al., 2016; Diokno & Peprah, 2021) in hospitality management (Trinidad, 2020), in teacher education (Rogayan Jr. & Reusia, 2021), in pharmacy (Carrido et al., 2015), in engineering (Laguador et al., 2020), in communication (Manalo et al., 2016), just to name a few.

To specify, this study centers on the internship experiences of Bachelor of Arts in Communication students in the Philippines who are the pioneer batch under the K-12 curriculum. This connotes that they belong to the batch of students in which revamps in the curriculum transpired. Particularly, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order (CMO) number 35, series of 2017, known as revised Policies, Standards, and Guidelines (PSGs) for Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BA Comm) program, was created to implement the "shift to learning competency-based standards/outcomes-based education." Article 4, section 5.2 of the CHED Memo Order states that communication as a field of study covers the various ways by which humans communicate, focuses on how various platforms and circumstances employ verbal and nonverbal cues to convey meaning, and covers a wide range of topics including the study of communication in interpersonal relationships, groups, workplaces, and cultures. Article 5, section 8 defined internship as providing students a hands-on experience in the use of communication in the industry. As regards the number

of hours to be completed, the BA Communication curriculum requires an internship course with a minimum of 200 hours of communication-related work preferably in a communication media organization.

Hora et al. (2020) conclude that student perspectives on internships are crucial to reframe the employability discussion, to include student experiences, to prevent one-size-fits-all methods of designing internships, and to encourage student self-reflection. In the same vein, there seems to be little empirical research on key issues on internships in Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BA Comm) in the Philippines considering a nationwide curricular revamp that took place as a result of the K-12 curriculum. To fill this gap, this research endeavor is twofold: (1) How aligned are the internship tasks given to BA Comm seniors by their host agencies toward their career trajectories anchored on CMO number 35, series of 2017? and (2) What hurdles did BA Comm seniors experience in their internship deployment?

METHOD

Research Design

Through a qualitative approach to address the research queries at hand, this study specifically utilized phenomenology as its research design because it endeavored a thorough exploration of what experiences meant to the participants in the study (Bennett, 2014a). It specifically concerns an investigation of the communication seniors' internship experiences to learn a common sense understanding and the meaning they ascribed to such experiences (Bennet, 2014b; Bliss, 2016).

Site and Participants

The 32 interns in the research were enrolled in Bachelor of Arts in Communication (BA Comm) in one prime state university in Cordillera Administrative Region in the Philippines - the total population of the batch. This denotes that total enumeration was used in the study. These interns were deployed in nine government agencies, one private agency, and one privately-owned business in diverse localities in the provinces of Benguet, Mountain Province, Ifugao, and Baguio City as a chartered city, respectively, but there were 31 host offices to be exact. The interns served in the various offices which started from March 14, 2022, to May 13, 2022, from Mondays through Fridays with an 8-hour shift including their work-from-home scheme. The interns devoted a total of 336 hours in the said offices, which was more than the minimum (200 hours) required by the Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines.

Data Collection Method

The main corpus of data was extracted through diary entries. Morrell-Scott (2018) and Unterhitzenberger and Lawrence (2022) pointed out that diaries are a unique way of data gathering which produces in-depth and substantial insights that are immediately documented, eliminating the possible retrospection bias sometimes present in conventional approaches like interviews. A journal-type instrument was utilized because the entries were written in a narrative format in response to general instructions (Ma & Oxford, 2014). There were three prompts in the study which asked the highlights of interns' day, the problems they encountered, and an optional section to elicit unique experiences of interns. In addition, an interval-contingent study was followed. Nezlek (2020) explained that an interval-contingent study creates a record after a predetermined period. In this research, each intern was asked to compose his/her diary entries at the end of the day.

To improve the diary data collection, the researchers followed the procedure of Arndt and Rose (2022). This was spearheaded by one researcher who happened to be the year-level adviser of the interns. First, the adviser discussed the format and content of the diary with the participants. Next, instructions were explicit to ensure that they understood how to recognize occurrences that were pertinent to the research. After that, the adviser requested the participants to record unique experiences, which was occupied by the 'optional' section in the diary. Finally, the adviser periodically reminded participants to keep up with the diary.

The interns turned in their diary entries through Google Classroom, being closely monitored by the year-level adviser. To fully express themselves in their diaries, the adviser told the interns that they could use English, Filipino, Iloko, or a combination in as much detail as they would.

Data Analysis

After harvesting voluminous diary entries from the thirty-two participants in a span of 42 days, the researchers employed Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). Gläser-Zikuda et al. (2020) avowed that QCA can evaluate vast amounts of textual qualitative data thoroughly, which is why it was the most appropriate way to analyze the data in this research. In particular, the researchers adopted the stages of content analysis created by Bengtsson (2016). The initial stage was 'decontextualization'. The researchers became familiar with the diary entries and read them to get a sense of the bigger picture or to understand what was happening. The next stage was 'recontextualization'. Along with the final list of meaning units, the original text was read again. The researchers went through the process of separating themselves from the data and allowed themselves to let go of irrelevant data that did not fit with the study's objectives. The third stage was 'categorization'. Extended meaning units were condensed by the researchers prior to arriving at categories. The final stage was 'compilation'. Following the creation of the categories, the analysis and writing process commenced.

As the last leg of the data analysis, the researchers invited two communication experts who were not involved in the research to function as inquiry auditors who evaluated the original text and the findings, and then determined whether they were reasonable. This was done to increase the validity of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first-fold dimension in the BA Comm internship experience demonstrates the alignment of the internship tasks given to BA Comm seniors by their host agencies. The themes are expressed in "MMMAPS" which stands for Media practitioner, Multimedia designer, Marketing assistant, administrative assistant, public information officer, and Social science researcher. The second-fold dimension reflects the hurdles that BA Comm seniors experienced in their internship deployment. The themes collected are pegged as "WorST" which means Work-related, Student-related, and Task-related hurdles. The simulacrum of the two-fold dimensions of the internship experience is shown in figure 1.



Figure 1: The Simulacrum of the Two-Fold Dimensions of the BA Comm Internship Experience

The study reveals that among the eight identified careers for the Bachelor of Arts in Communication graduates outlined in Section 5.4 of the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order (CMO) number 35, series of 2017, four trajectories were aligned. These are: (1) media practitioner, (2) multimedia designer, (3) public information officer, and (4) social science researcher. The two other trajectories, being an administrative assistant and a marketing assistant, were the other tasks based on the needs of their assigned agencies.

Furthermore, it is essential to note the program outcomes particular to the BA Comm program enumerated in section 6 of CMO number 35, series of 2017. As defined by Arizona State University Office of Evaluation and Educational Effectiveness (2022), program outcomes refer to the gained skills, knowledge, and competencies that students should have when they complete a degree program. As stipulated in the CMO, there are 11 program outcomes specific to the graduates of the BA Communication program. These are: (a) define and access information needs, assess, and organize information and knowledge, produce, share, and utilize information and knowledge; (b) communicate in different formats and platforms (print, broadcast, and online); (c) prepare communication/media plan; (d) conduct communication and media research and evaluation; (e) develop and produce communication materials in different formats and platforms; (f) develop and produce communication materials in different formats and platforms; (h) adhere to ethical standards and practices; (i) know and practice rights and responsibilities in the communication profession; (j) demonstrate development orientation in communication work; and (k) apply communication theories/models, principles, practices, and tools in development work.

Accordingly, being a media practitioner and a public information officer coincide with program outcome

(B) which is on communicating in different formats and platforms such as print, broadcast, and online. The interns were regularly engaged in writing, editing, and revising news and magazine articles, and were also entrusted with conceptualizing contents for the social media accounts of their agencies throughout their internship period. BA Comm students take Journalism Principles and Practices as one of the core courses. Thus, it is expected that graduates are equipped with excellent writing and lay outing abilities while working with colleagues in an agency. The tasks given to the interns confirm the presence of numerous writing chores at work in co-operation with colleagues, ranging from concept development to text creation and editing (Fiialka et al., 2021).

On being a multimedia designer, the interns were delegated to layout posters and certificates. This undertaking is reflected in program outcome (E) which is on developing and producing communication materials in different formats and platforms. Even though the interns were not taught various editing and lay outing software, they delivered the expected outputs in their agencies because they took the chance to study how to use editing software such as Adobe Photoshop, Lightroom, and online editing platforms like Canva (Bateman, 2022). Not all skills can be learned in school so most of the student-interns had been subjected to self-directed learning to gain additional skills (Tekkol & Demirel, 2018).

The interns who took social science researcher roles partly fulfill program outcome (D) on conducting communication and media research. The courses: Communication Research and Thesis 1 and 2 were the background of the interns in fulfilling tasks in this trajectory. Unfortunately, no specific communication research undertakings were initiated based on the responses of the students. Albeit this, the interns were able to fulfill research assistant roles including assisting in the data gathering, doing interview transcriptions, or completing necessary research work (Eaton, 2017).

The generated theme on being a marketing assistant is not listed in the CMO number 35, series of 2017. However, program outcome (G) stipulates that BA Comm graduates may develop entrepreneurial capabilities. Although there is no specific course in the curriculum to particularly hone the aforementioned capability of the students, additional business-related trainings from reliable centers with focus on proper marketing strategies may equip the interns with the necessary skills for them to venture into the realm of business. Nian et al. (2014)'s study supports this by stipulating that just like any other disciplines, sufficient knowledge and learned skills can make entrepreneurs (Kuratko, 2004).

The last theme on being an administrative assistant is likewise not specified as a trajectory for BA Comm graduates and is not listed under the program outcomes either. Nevertheless, majority of the student-interns were given clerical work and office assistant assignments based on the needs of their host agencies. This is consistent with the results in the study by Manalo et al. (2016), which found that the majority of BA Comm interns worked on administrative tasks like filling out paperwork, making phone calls, sending letters and papers, or carrying out small office duties like photocopying documents. This further explains the versatility of the students during the internship period.

It has been made apparent that the "WorST" hurdles in BA Comm internship deployment were (1) Workplace-related, (2) Student-related, and (3) Task-related. Workplace-related hurdles such as abrupt changes, haphazard tasks, lack of updates, noisy office, obscure instructions, poor internet connectivity, and unwelcoming employees can be pegged as organizational culture. Mohsen et al. (2020) defined organization culture as the set of expectations, attitudes, and practices that govern how employees should conduct themselves in a workplace. Matkó and Takács (2017) specifically call this organizational culture as 'artifacts' – that which can be felt and heard by individuals, the unwritten rules of "how things work around here (Oud, 2008)." Many organizational elements fall under the category of artifacts, including employee office equipment, facilities, and conduct, which have a significant impact on workplace culture. Another perspective is that organizational culture is a custom that facilitates coordination (Guiso et al., 2015). However, the participants in the study perceived the organizational culture in their respective host offices as something problematic.

Another set of hurdles that BA Comm interns experienced is student related. These hurdles can be about their relationship with themselves like students' inhibitions to ask from their superiors, being tardy at the workplace, or being distracted while working at home, or it can be their relationship with others, i.e. relationship with co-interns. Because organizations are made up of groups of individuals who must communicate with one another in order to carry out their daily tasks linked to their jobs, shyness is a concern at work (Taormina, 2019). The interns' inhibition to ask is rooted from being judged by their superiors, attributed to a below par performance (Apprich, 2017; Taormina, 2019). The interns also included tardiness as a hurdle. Warne et al. (2020) identified in their research that tardiness is a prevalent issue in many schools because of transportation,

poor time management and discipline, and distance from school (Kgosi, 2016). In the case of the interns, their reasons included traffic jam, staying up late, not being able to get up early, no water supply at home, among others. In another light, most respondents in the empirical research of Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020) said that they are more productive and better able to focus at home than at work, and that they are more productive at home than at work. However, the work-from-home scheme for the interns had an adverse impact due to multiple interruptions (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). When it comes to relationship with others, the interns determined issues with their co-interns because they were not helpful, and they were filled with complaints. These unprofessional behaviors are consistent with the study of Hamblin et al. (2015) which should be averted as soon as possible (Taino, 2016) since the likelihood that a worker can complete tasks without being distracted by conflicts with others rises with less involvement in a conflict (Enehaug et al., 2016).

Lastly, there were task-related hurdles mentioned by the interns specifically in the areas of emceeing on smoother program facilitation because of abrupt changes in the program flow, writing feature articles, policy briefs, and travel orders. These two areas are considered, in a more general term, as lack of communication skills. This is related to Peltola (2018) as the participants in her research lacked sophisticated writing and oral communication abilities. Hence, it is essential to strike a balance between learning and applying effective communication methods (Duncan et al., 2017; Neacşu, 2015), which is emceeing and writing in the case of this research endeavor.

CONCLUSION

Internship remains an inevitable and an invaluable experience in the undergraduate life of students. In light of the results, BA Comm seniors experienced only 50 % of their career trajectories anchored on CHED Memo Order number 35, series of 2017. This means that only four out of eight career trajectories were aligned, which shows a loophole in the deployment of the interns and the tasks assigned to them by their host agencies. On another note, there were hurdles that BA Comm seniors had to undergo in their internship deployment. These problems may already be addressed prior to their deployment for smoother internship experience. Primarily, students were able to undertake various tasks where they put to practice not only their degree-specific skills, but also their overall capabilities. These findings thus posit that several preparatory steps should be considered to target the listed goals for students when they graduate. First, an internship committee may be established by colleges and universities which would focus on matters related to internship only. This allows the individuals involved to focus on polishing the matters of significance to the internship activity of the students. Next, the pool of faculty members handling major courses could conduct a forum to enumerate prospective agencies. In general, an established and fully equipped internship committee could not only assist the faculty members in carrying out delegation duties but also aid in the placement of the students in relevant internship institutions that could help prepare them for the appropriate workforce upon completion of their degree program. In reference to the hurdles gleaned from the experience of the students, the findings in this research may provide areas in which workplace transitions could be developed.

Workplace-related hurdles can be addressed by providing pre-internship training that may orient students of organizational cultures. In this regard, interns may to know how to adjust to situations like abrupt changes, haphazard tasks, lack of updates, noisy office, obscure instructions, poor internet connectivity, and unwelcoming employees. On the other hand, pre-internship training that emphasizes interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships to avoid student-related hurdles during their deployment should be incorporated. Thirdly, in-depth training that focuses on emceeing and writing feature articles, policy briefs, travel orders can be done prior to students' deployment.

All in all, the findings of the study offer an insight that a comprehensive and longer pre-internship training program that approximately lasts a month be made for a smoother workplace transition. When it comes to generalizability, this study may fall short as it was conducted in only one state university with 32 BA Comm interns. This means that other researchers may explore on more higher education institutions in the public or private sectors. Next, there were a few interns who did not include detailed entries, and there were some who wrote the same information almost every week. This, therefore, calls for a follow-up in the forms of an interview or a focus group discussion to extract what is missing in the interns' experiences, which can enrich the results of the study. Since this research only revolved around the alignment of the internship tasks given to BA Comm seniors by their host agencies toward their career trajectories and the hurdles that they encountered, others may want to obtain learning experiences of interns as well as their suggestions to improve their internship experience in the future.

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