

INTERNSHIP
MARKET
RESEARCH STUDY

COMMISSIONED BY THE NORTHEAST OHIO COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION • MARCH 2009

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008, the Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education (NOCHE) engaged the services of Lazorpoint LLC to conduct a study to evaluate the perceptions and segmentation of Northeast Ohio student candidates for internships. The study, funded by the Fenn Educational Fund of The Cleveland Foundation, sought to examine student populations, identify underserved and underrepresented segments, frame common barriers and misperceptions affecting internship participation, and develop key strategic options and hypotheses for initiatives that might improve student awareness of and participation in the internship process.

THE PROCESS

The research process included several key components:

- >> 6 interviews with non-faculty academic staff and NOCHE professionals heavily involved in the internship process;
- >> 26 interviews with a broad representation of students, including those active in internship programs, and those unfamiliar and uninvolved with internships;
- >> An email survey with more than 550 respondents from Northeast Ohio colleges and universities, with extensive discussion about biases, perceptions, and characteristics of successful internship experiences;
- >> A campus-based focus group with 12 student participants, framing and refining key findings, recommendations, and message themes.

THE CONTEXT

Higher education, its cost, and its role in job creation are at the forefront of governmental, business, and family dialogue at a level not seen in recent times. Government entities at all levels, especially in Northeast Ohio, are working to build, enrich, and retain the talent base so critical to the region's success, and to reverse the oft-cited "brain drain" that has plagued Northeast Ohio. The mix of jobs continues to evolve, and many industries are beginning to grapple with the long foretold challenges of a rapidly aging and hard-to-replace work force. As the job mix changes and unemployment rises, more adults are going back to school to retool their own skills, resulting in a shifting profile among Northeast Ohio college students.

In spite of the vast array of initiatives aimed at helping college students find internships, co-op jobs and permanent positions, these students have become, in many ways, harder to recruit and retain. By many estimates, including a 2007 study sponsored by Michigan State University's Collegiate Employment Research Institute, students have become more reliant on parents, more security conscious, and more "entitled," while at the same time feeling more secure in their parental backup systems, and more flexible and restless in their search for "perfect" options. They are less sure of their careers, less focused, and less goal savvy.

KEY FINDINGS

The research identifies significant "disconnects," misperceptions, and biases at work as students think about internships. Internships are often seen as the domain of the more privileged and parent-coached college students whose parents have the awareness, contacts, and financial wherewithal to support internship activities. Parental encouragement is viewed as important because many students perceive internships as poorly paid jobs with higher transportation, wardrobe, and other associated costs. Internships are not seen as the overwhelmingly attractive career-testing experience they are meant to be; rather, students perceive internships to be unattractive jobs where copying, coffee fetching, and mail room activities are just as likely to be required as meaningful career enhancing experiences.

Moreover, internships are viewed as too limited in number and too hard to find. Students who know about internships can only imagine opportunities at large, brand-name employers that are difficult to access and navigate. Most students believe internships exist primarily for business and some STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) majors, but rarely for other majors where students tend to be even less sure of their career paths, and less focused in their career interests.

Students intuitively know internships must be good. Students who have not heard of internships embrace them as a positive goal and an important way to validate their career interests and direction. The most interested students, predictably, are highly motivated self-starters who will be the future "stars" coveted by employers. These are the people who face adversity, overcome it, and make things happen.

Compensation and the economics of internships came up consistently as critical issues. Internships are often seen as sub-par economic choices, despite a wealth of research that shows internships are a strong choice for students needing to earn money.

The timing of internships in the academic cycle also appears to be an issue. Internships are seen as senior year, possibly junior year, opportunities among the subset of students who know about them. The value of internships is explicitly tied to the career experience and the opportunity to investigate career alternatives, and students participate principally for that reason. However, students are forced to make decisions about their investment of non-academic time based on the financial realities and the cost of college education – not the overall, long-term value to their career choice. Internships are not considered a credible choice to enhance students' financial position, although internships are a demonstrated choice for earning "real" money while, at the same time, gaining important career experiences and perspectives.

CONCLUSION

From a marketing strategy point of view, an organization promoting internships is in an enviable position. Internships serve a variety of constituencies who together want to match quality students with quality jobs, in part for the short-term value, but in larger part for the longer term and more direct purpose of creating great employees. In short, there is a real market need that begs to be met.

The primary problem related to internships is communication. The value of internships, once understood, is compelling to all constituents. The experience limitations around internships are, in general, easily addressed. The goal now is to change the "best kept secret" - internships - into a higher profile and valued resource for Northeast Ohio employers, students, and other stakeholders. Accomplishing this change will provide a deeply valued service that improves the satisfaction of students, faculty, and employers across the region. Further, internships will be an integral part of the revitalization and restabilization so sorely needed across Northeast Ohio.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE & SCOPE

RESEARCH

The primary research objective of this study was to determine the reasons students do, or do not, seek internship opportunities in Northeast Ohio, with the ultimate goal being to increase the number of students that seek and complete internship opportunities.

Aside from the obvious power of internships for students and employers, there is a larger objective in play around Northeast Ohio economic development and elimination of the “brain drain” that continues to affect the region. According to a 2006 Employers Resource Council study, there is a clear correlation between a student completing an internship, and the likelihood of that student staying in Northeast Ohio.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The scope of this study was to identify the following items:

- A. Underserved and underrepresented students among internship rosters, as well as possible factors driving underrepresentation such as majors, geographic location, age, and other variables as appropriate.
- B. Barriers and common perceptions preventing or dissuading students from seeking internships.
- C. High level suggestions to overcome identified barriers and possible immediate impact activities as well as longer term initiatives for Northeast Ohio to pursue, such as new messaging, events, media communications and literature.

RESEARCH PROCESS

The process for this project began with a multi-point effort to collect qualitative perceptions, experiences, and insight from market interviews. This data was enhanced by the accumulation of related insights from secondary sources, combined with validating and enriching insights from a 554-respondent email survey.

Where practical, the process leveraged the well-established strategic interview protocol often dubbed “day in the life.” That protocol focuses on creating a “virtual video” of the experience of students who are or have been considering internships. The protocol builds deep, pain-uncovering questions to develop true life vignettes about the actual experiences, feelings, lessons learned, and insights from the interview.

The sources of data specifically include the following:

- >> Academic interviews were conducted with Dr. Shearle Furnish – Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at Youngstown State University; Mary Rose Tichar – Director of Co-op Programs at Case Western Reserve University; and Dr. Dennis Kincaid – Professor in the School of Business at Malone University. These academic professionals were selected because they possess a wide range of experience with internships, represent different schools, and maintain varying roles within the academic community.
- >> Eight in-person student interviews and eighteen telephone interviews with students were conducted.
- >> A non-statistical survey was conducted with 554 student respondents.
- >> A focus group was conducted at the Taylor Institute for Direct Marketing at The University of Akron. Twelve students participated.

KEY FINDINGS

As identified below, interview respondents described a series of experiences, expectations, biases and perceptions surrounding internships. The findings below list key categories of the internship process and students' perceptions - in their own words.

LOOKING FOR AN INTERNSHIP

Students looking for internships are frustrated. More than half recognize the value of internships and proactively seek those opportunities, yet the process is not viewed favorably. Most described the process as boring, time-consuming, tedious, confusing and/or scattered. Few had any clear picture of how the internship process is supposed to work, describing it as a mysterious and unattractive process. In fact, many were overwhelmed by the challenges in sorting through sparse (and at other times tangled) webs of information. Many believed that real and quality internships are reserved for people from connected and well-heeled families.

- >> *I think there should be a list of internships. I don't even know where to go to find out about them.*
- >> *There are just too many options. I wish the school or the counselors or someone would guide you a little.*
- >> *The internship process is broken. When is it that I would be looking for an internship? I don't know when I should even look. Is there a specific time frame? If I was told I needed to find an internship, I would be under the impression I was about to finish school. What an internship is and what it can offer is not clearly defined, at least not to me. I'm not sure exactly where to go to find an internship. What resources are available to me?*
- >> *There is no one place to go to look for internships. Maybe a list or a booklet of them would be helpful.*
- >> *It is the infamous Catch 22 - an internship would give you real world experience, and students need experience, but how do you get a meaningful internship without any experience and without a degree?*
- >> *A lot of places still go through the motions and then will give the internship to someone they know. There is especially a notion of the good old boy thing in sports.*

IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF INTERNSHIPS

Students understand the value of practical, on-the-ground and real world experience to their prospective employers and their own confidence in their career choices. While the experience is vital, students also yearn for other results from the experience, including contacts, job offers, earnings and social connections. Students' comments include the following:

- >> *You can have all the academic knowledge, but unless you go out and do something, you don't really have a clue.*
- >> *People like internships where there is a lot of one-on-one or at least a very small group of other interns. Individual mentors are good too. I would want somewhere where I can get the full experience of the job and learn a lot.*

The current study also found that 56% of students interviewed were aware of internships in their field, 40% of students had applied for an internship, but only 30% had completed an internship.

STUDENTS' PRIORITIES WHEN LOOKING FOR AN INTERNSHIP

This study revealed that students took many factors into consideration when looking for an internship, such as distance, pay, and quality of the internships.

1. DISTANCE

Many students indicated they had a car and were willing to drive 10-40 minutes for an internship. As one respondent summarized:

- >> *I would only drive 20-30 minutes for an internship, especially with gas prices. For something fabulous I might go a little further.*

However, the study indicated that one of the major barriers listed for not looking for or taking an internship was transportation.

Travel issues can clearly represent unnecessary obstacles to the attractiveness of available internship choices.

2. PAY

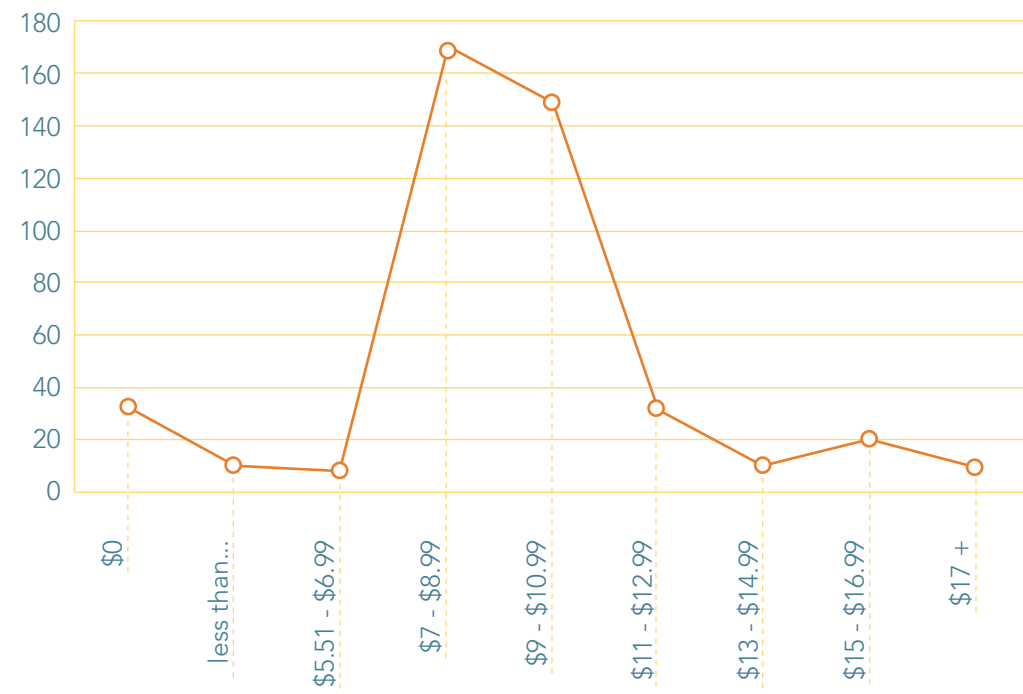
There were two predominant aspects of students' responses regarding internship compensation. First, some students thought that all internships were unpaid. Second, student willingness to take an unpaid internship and, if so, why, were issues. Comments included the following:

- >> *Internships - they really suck, you will have to work a lot and not make any money for it.*
- >> *I was sending out resumes trying to get something in the sports business related to what I want to do. I went to news channels, but none of them really paid. I ended up doing maintenance for the summer to make money.*
- >> *I've never applied for an internship. I applied for something I thought was an internship, but it was actually a job. I need an internship to be paid. Half of the ones I'm told about are not paid and pay is a necessity.*

A paid internship was always preferred to an unpaid internship, but many students were still willing to take an unpaid internship. For paid internships, students were willing to work for less than \$5.50 to more than \$17.00 per hour. The average acceptable minimum hourly wage was about \$7.50/hour. See Figure 1.

This compares to an average hourly pay range in Northeast Ohio of between \$8.95 for public relations interns to more than \$15.00 for application developers, according to a 2008 study of internship wages completed by the Employers Resource Council. According to that same study, more than 80% of internships in Northeast Ohio are paid and about 18% provide academic credit.

FIGURE 1



The reasons given for taking an unpaid internship were to gain experience, network, receive academic credit, or work in a company with a good reputation. The largest percentage of students who would take an unpaid internship said it was because it may lead to a possible job offer. Some students could never afford to take an unpaid internship, but according to the study, only 5% of respondents would never take an unpaid internship. See Figure 2 for details. Note comments below.

- >> Money is not that big of a deal - but I can't afford to lose money - it's all about the experience.
- >> I would take an internship that is unpaid because it would be marketable and it would be an advantage.
- >> I think that companies need to at least pay a monthly stipend - \$900-\$1000/month to keep an intern from getting a summer job instead of an internship.
- >> I would take an unpaid internship. I am a big supporter of the experience and skills that would be acquired. Sometimes it's hard to get hands-on experience in a career field unless you take an unpaid internship.
- >> I would take an unpaid internship if I could get class credit. There is no way I could not get paid for a full time internship in lieu of my job, though.
- >> I would take an unpaid internship if it had something to do with my major and "to get my foot in the door," but the company should at least give a stipend for living expenses.

Pay is important to students. Only 22% of students receive scholarships/grants that they do not have to repay. Most students rely on loans (federal and private), income from a job (full-time, part-time, or work-study) or their own savings to pay for school. See Figure 3.

FIGURE 2

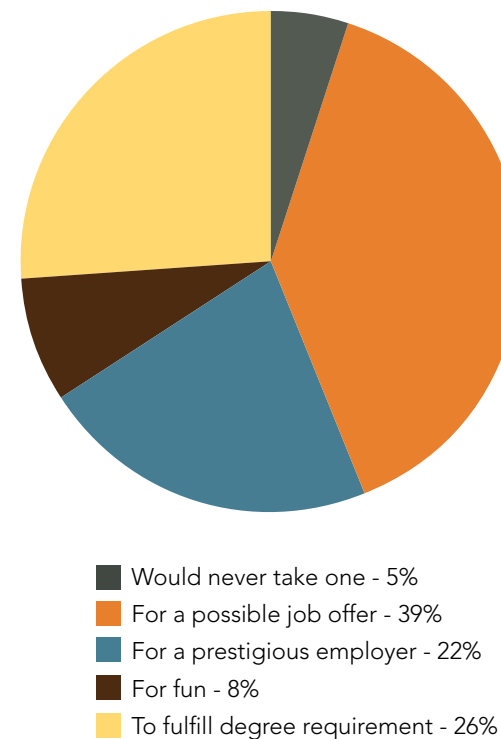
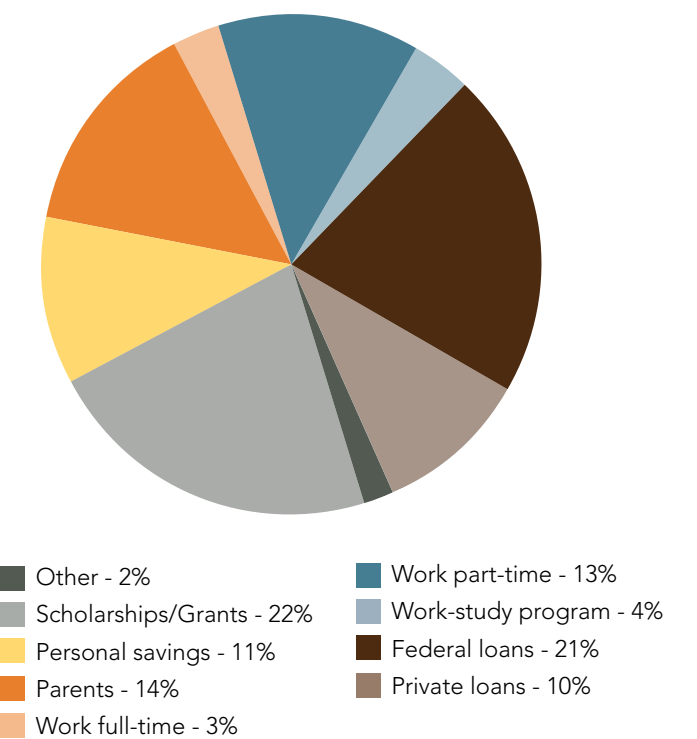


FIGURE 3



The most common "other" answers were "employer pays tuition" or some kind of military benefit.

Thus, a minority of students may take an unpaid internship for the experience, but most students prefer a paid internship.

The economy in March 2009 is also affecting college affordability, and students and colleges alike are looking for new options to help fund the cost of a college education.

3. QUALITY

A quality internship is important to students. They do not want to do menial tasks and they would like to learn something from their internship experience, yet they expect and fear an experience more focused on making coffee than learning. They say, for example:

- >> It seems like internships are so competitive, but then in reality, a monkey could do it - the duties don't match the requirements - the duties are mundane. You would think they are looking for someone who could give good input.
- >> What I would want an internship to be is to make me a member of a team as opposed to someone who is shoved around. What I actually expect is that I'll get people coffee...the stereotype.
- >> I would like a proper description of the internship - what will I ACTUALLY be doing?

Increasingly, many industries have a history, or an emerging trend, to only hire employees with internship experience. This trend will likely continue, especially in fields like publishing, radio/TV, advertising, international relations, and engineering.

PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNSHIPS

Many students perceived internships negatively, believing that they would be unpaid and that they would not involve any meaningful work. (Note: In reality, 80% of internships in Northeast Ohio are paid, most at a rate significantly exceeding typical minimum wages.) Realigning expectations and perceptions around internships - what they are and what they are not - must be a key communications priority. Comments include the following:

- >> *When I think of internships, I think of "businesslike" or whatever your profession...following or shadowing someone. Being their "go get me coffee person." If you want to be a lawyer, you get an internship at a law office and then go get their double espresso skinny latte.*
- >> *There must be so many people out there looking that companies can treat people really badly, that they can kind of not acknowledge people and then offer them an unpaid job that people willingly take.*
- >> *I thought internships were only as helpers and for menial tasks.*

STUDENTS' SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Students were asked about their sources of information. Their responses fell into two categories: people and media. In general, they claim openly to talk to faculty and friends, although research indicates that parents are an especially critical source of input for most students. Predictably, online media sources dominate as a source of information.

1. PEOPLE

Thirty percent of students responding to the survey had completed an internship. Of the students who had completed internships, 27% had leveraged relationships with faculty members/professors to find internships, 20% leveraged family/friends, and 16% chose "other" as the source to help locate an internship. The most common "other" sources included high school guidance counselors, current or previous employers, and religious organization members. Students interviewed said:

- >> *I talked to a few professors about internships. Some professors do freelancing. The nice teachers tell the students about internship opportunities.*
- >> *Professors in some classes refer kids to career services, especially when you are taking classes for your major and not just intro classes.*
- >> *I got an internship through a professor in one of my online classes.*
- >> *If I needed any kind of information, I would just ask my friends.*
- >> *Talk to professors to promote internships. If it comes recommended from a professor, kids are likely to check it out.*

2. MEDIA

Every student interviewed, the majority of the students surveyed, and all of the students in the focus group listed the internet, not surprisingly, as their primary information source. Comments included the following:

- >> *If it's not on the internet, I won't read it.*
- >> *I am on the internet at least once a day.*
- >> *I get information on internships through the department head; he emails out to all of the majors in that department. They also have a newsletter. Plus I could just Google "summer job."*
- >> *We don't all check email that often, but we get texts immediately. Caution: we don't want text messages regarding internships every day though.*
- >> *I use my cell phone or computer (send email, AIM, I'm not a big Facebook or MySpace fan, but I do have an account). I use my campus email mostly. I also have AOL email...it is for junk. If the school was giving me information, they would send it to my school email.*

Most students were members of at least one social networking community (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, Friendster, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.) and the median response for amount of time spent on social networking sites per day was one hour. While social networking is still unfolding in terms of the marketing and communications opportunity it presents, this communication medium will have a role in reaching students. One comment summarizes many:

- >> *I get my info from Facebook (I'm addicted), over the phone and texting, and face-to-face with my friends. If I am getting info for school I might also look to the school's web site where there are news feeds, a campus directory, campus email, and class scheduling.*

Students monitored other media as sources of information as well. Many claimed to read the school newspaper religiously, the local newspaper, or school bulletin boards, as well as listen to local radio and watch TV.

- >> *If I needed info about things at school, I would have to seek it out. I would go to the Career Center or Advising Center if I were looking for info about internships. I am in a sorority and we have regular meetings where people report about different things that are going on. The liaison sends out info through e-notes. Plus, I also get some email reminders directly from the university.*
- >> *If something is happening on campus, groups do a good job of advertising. There is a Spirit Wall which all the students pass on the way to classes. It is on the quad and people paint huge signs and post them up there. I also get emails for stuff from the school or the groups that I belong to. I don't really go out and look for it. There is also word of mouth.*

BARRIERS TO INTERNSHIPS

Many barriers were identified that prevent students from seeking or completing internships. These reasons include lack of time, lack of compensation, family obligations, lack of communication, lack of knowledge about internships, lack of transportation, competing priorities, and just general lack of initiative. Like the population at large, students are stretched and squeezed, and they feel overwhelmed with their many commitments. Many are compromised financially, so compensation is a real issue. Respondents reiterated time and again how difficult it is to find information, sort through it, and find a worthwhile job opportunity. Comments include the following:

1. LACK OF TIME/OTHER COMMITMENTS

- >> *I'm pledging a fraternity. That takes lots of my spare time.*
- >> *I've never taken or even looked for an internship because of the time commitment, because it wasn't needed at the time, and because there was no opportunity at the community college.*
- >> *I take time away from my studying to do an internship. Then I have to study at night so then I have no social life because I need 9 hours of sleep to function.*
- >> *For some it is a stressor because it ups the workload and cuts back on social time.*
- >> *Class times are not flexible (they are usually in the middle of the day) which leaves little room for a "typical" work schedule (between 9-5).*
- >> *It's hard for nontraditional students, especially those with children, to get internships.*

These comments are even more interesting when set in a context of the following conclusions from the Michigan State University study that notes:

Today's young adults are different. Many claim to want challenging and rewarding careers, yet they do not take necessary actions to plan and prepare for these careers. Compared to older generations, they are more likely to move from job to job, looking for the right job, much as these young people would surf on the internet, moving from site to site, looking for the right information. Jeff Arnett revealed in his 2004 study of young adults from 18 to 28 that they become deeply self absorbed during this period as they search for their personal identity. They become involved in an array of experiences, jumping from job to job or experience to experience. Parents provide support by allowing them to come home to recharge and by financing their activities.¹

2. LACK OF COMPENSATION

- >> *The fact that people think you should work for free is crazy!!!*
- >> *It seems like the cool ones aren't paid because they are doing you a favor. Sometimes you just can't take an opportunity because it is not economically viable.*
- >> *If your parents make enough to support you, internships are OK. Only the wealthy can take unpaid internships.*
- >> *Most internships don't pay - at least not political internships.*
- >> *Internships are usually not paid. You do a lot of bitch work so you can be around the higher up individuals to see what they do.*

¹ Georgia T. Chao and Philip D. Gardner, "Today's Young Adults: Surfing for the Right Job" (white paper prepared for MonsterTRAK.com, Michigan State University, 2007).

Compensation and quality are two fundamental attributes of internships. Many student candidates have a negative view of taking an internship which they consider "beneath" them. According to the Michigan State study mentioned above, "Some young adults perceive themselves to be better than others and thus, entitled to better things in life. Nearly 50% held moderate to high superiority beliefs about themselves. This sense of entitlement may encourage young adults to avoid compromises or concessions and to continue their search for the ideal job or career."

3. LACK OF KNOWLEDGE/COMMUNICATION

- >> *I don't really know where to look. Internships aren't posted around the university and I don't ever see internships in the newspaper. I guess you just hear from the teachers or the department secretary. I don't even know which companies to ask if they have any available.*
- >> *A lot of students have blinders on ... they are looking at job and studies; job and grades; job and kids and grades; job and kids and study, that sort of thing. If it is not a requirement or they don't see a fast turnaround of value in doing it, they might not show a great deal of initiative in getting there. That is where I see the institution has an absolutely requisite role in encouraging students and in making the process of winning one simple enough. And also in trying to make sure that they are paid internships as much as possible.*
- >> *I wish I was introduced to the concept of internships a lot earlier – like my senior year of high school would have been good. I'm jealous of the high school kid who knew to get an internship because "my dad knows so and so." He's already had an internship and has experience to use for the next internship or job.*

4. PERCEIVED LACK OF AVAILABILITY

Some students cited specific majors as lacking available internships, but others stated the belief of a general lack of internships. Students perceive that internships are not widely available.

- >> *Because of HIPAA laws, there is a limit to what you can do as an intern at a hospital or medical facility.*
- >> *Medical, advertising, marketing, and PR need more internships.*
- >> *It is hard to find internships in social services and they are mostly unpaid.*
- >> *None of the companies at the Internship Fair had a need for art/graphic design majors.*
- >> *In Ohio, job opportunities are limited.*

OBSERVATIONS

Key findings from the study on internships and why students do or don't participate are summarized as follows:

MISPERCEPTIONS, MISINFORMATION, AND LACK OF INFORMATION ABOUT.

- >> Less than two-thirds of students are aware of internships. In general, students aware of internships tend to come from more affluent backgrounds with better educated parents. Alternatively, they tend to be very proactive and involved student leaders and top performers who garner special interest and attention from faculty.
- >> Students who know about internships, or learn about them anew, intuitively see their value and relevance in personal career selection and growth.
- >> In general, internships are viewed as being primarily secured by "who you know" or reserved for the privileged. Misperceptions about low pay make internships seemingly attractive only when a career pursuit deems them "necessary."
- >> Students believe that internships are primarily available from large, brand-name organizations with sophisticated training and processes for recruiting new college graduates. They do not know how to look, or where to look, for internship opportunities in smaller and/or entrepreneurial organizations.

GETTING INFORMATION ABOUT INTERNSHIPS IS DIFFICULT, THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION VARY, AND SOURCES ARE OFTEN MISINFORMED.

- >> Students turn to parents and faculty for guidance about jobs, careers, and internships. They seek information in a variety of online venues that they find difficult to locate and navigate.
- >> College career service offices are a classic channel for internship information, but those offices are often overburdened and juggle competing interests.
- >> College and high school financial aid staffs are important resources for students and parents digesting the economics of college. Internships are another element in the arsenal to help students afford their education. To the extent students gain experience, and comparable or better pay (compared to typical campus jobs), everyone wins.

- >> Online information sources and media channels will be critical to reach student candidates. The classic options are all relevant, including Facebook, Twitter, blogs, email, and the like. Students appear to want to discuss and share their experiences, and will do so whether facilitated or not. This presents an opportunity to facilitate the capture and sharing of student experiences and ratings around internships. This would be an obviously valuable service for students, but it would also help promote high performance employers, and serve to add some incentive in the mix to drive quality internship experiences.

ECONOMICS IS AS OFTEN A DRIVER OF INTERNSHIPS AS EXPERIENCE. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD NOT BE MINIMIZED OR UNDERESTIMATED, ESPECIALLY IN THESE TIMES.

- >> While "experience" and "career exploration" are clear drivers of the internship experience, students are also struggling significantly with financial issues around their education, and they need to earn money. Internships, in general, are a much better source of financial reward than most assume.

THE TIMING FOR THE "INTRODUCTION" TO INTERNSHIPS DISCUSSION IS NOT JUST JUNIOR/SENIOR YEAR, AS MOST ASSUME. IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITIES TO CONSIDER AND TAKE ACTION OCCUR MUCH SOONER.

- >> Students are most attentive to their career exploration and financial planning/aid needs in their senior year of high school and approaching their senior year in college. Clearly in the high school period, and presumably in the college period, parents play a key role in the dialogue and decision making. Parents are especially attuned to the financial issues in late high school years as they contemplate college costs.

THE INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE IS, AT BEST, "VARIABLE" AND NOT ALWAYS ATTRACTIVE.

- >> Implementing mechanisms to assure that the internship experience is as attractive and high quality as possible will be a key to successful expansion of internships in Northeast Ohio.

CONCLUSIONS

Perception problems abound for internships. For the most part, the perceived problems are only occasionally valid. In most cases, internships are available, they are attractive learning experiences, and they can contribute meaningfully towards the economics of education.

Two major conclusions from this research are as follows:

1. A SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITY EXISTS TO IMPROVE THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE INTERNS GAIN.

Improving the experience will be critical to improving the reputation and the participation of students in Northeast Ohio internships. Dimensions of improving the experience include the following:

- >> Helping employers to frame and offer attractive internships that
 - o Add value to the organization;
 - o Provide opportunities for appropriate vetting of candidates for permanent hire;
 - o Offer interns valuable learning and economic advantage.
- >> Connecting quality intern candidates with quality internship roles.
- >> Providing a mechanism for hassle-free exit for either party in the event of a mismatch between the employer's needs and the student's interests or abilities.
- >> Helping interns to realize a high quality internship experience that includes
 - o Quality learning experiences, including regular, constructive, one-on-one feedback;
 - o Comparable economics – considering pay, cost of travel, expense of wardrobe, etc.;
 - o Opportunity to explore a variety of settings across industry, role, company size, reporting manager, etc.

Supporting this conclusion are the many state programs focused on creating more “experiential education” in higher education. The Ohio Co-op/Internship Program has committed \$250 million over five years to help create high quality academic programs. The Third Frontier Internship Program was created to specifically focus on high tech industries and students with STEM interests. Across the board, more funding is being set aside for internships. In fact, Dr. Shearle Furnish at Youngstown State comments, “The universities prize internships highly and participatory learning is important for post-graduation placement.”

2. COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT AND AWARENESS OF INTERNSHIPS NEED TO INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY. COMMUNICATIONS WILL BE THE LYNCHPIN FOR DRIVING REAL GROWTH AND VALUE IN NORTHEAST OHIO FROM INTERNSHIPS.

The reactions students shared about the difficult process of finding internships underlines the need for a centralized internship service. The challenge is finding a way to assure students know about NEOintern.net and its offerings. Key ingredients for improved communications will include the following:

- >> Better outreach education, focusing on key majors and key micromarkets.
- >> Earlier involvement in the career progression and economic discussions of the students – perhaps as early as high school.
- >> Broader leverage of the variety of channels for accessing students, including traditional channels like faculty and career services and extending into non-traditional channels such as academic advisors, financial aid officers, science/math clubs and programs in the high schools, summer job channels and social networks.
- >> Tighter partnerships, perhaps including co-branding, with colleges and other internship promoting entities. This may be especially important relative to the college financial planning/aid apparatus that exists at each college and each high school.
- >> More on-point messaging that recognizes the experiential value of internships, but also treats the limits of internships with candor and underlines the economic value of internships as a part of the portfolio of options available to make college more affordable. Messaging should focus on the following:
 - o Internships are attractive, money-earning job experiences.
 - // Internships offer learning, career options, broader experiences, job networking, improved prospects for future hiring. But not insignificantly, they are normally well paying jobs.
 - o Completing an internship helps students afford college, and leave college with options and confidence about their choice of career.
 - o High quality internships are available in Northeast Ohio for students of all majors and backgrounds.

FUTURE RESEARCH INITIATIVES

This report has focused on students and their perspective around internships. A companion study of employers, parents, and universities and their respective roles in the internship equation might better illuminate the totality of the picture around internships and the choices made around them.

The establishment of a streamlined process resulting in high quality internships and an increase in the number of internships completed in Northeast Ohio will significantly improve our region's talent development and retention efforts. It is our hope that this study will aid in this important component to our regional success.

