

The Case for Increased Emphasis on Internships at CU Boulder

Internships during college provide meaningful applied learning experiences that drive student success during their undergraduate careers and afterwards. As one of the few high-impact practices that engage students outside of the university setting, internship experiences are essential mechanisms for students to apply their academic backgrounds to real-world settings. Internship experiences also offer the opportunity for students to develop transferrable skills, gain perspective on career interests, and network with the community.

In addition to these benefits to students, internships serve as a bridge to community participation with the university. Community members and employers have much to gain in partnerships with the university through internship programs. Such programs are gateways for organizations to hire students and alumni, increase innovative thinking, and expand collaboration into other areas of engagement.

Currently, CU Boulder has a number of obstacles to a successfully implemented campus internship program:

1. CU Boulder does not provide internship credit across academic units and therefore many thousands of students are unable to receive academic recognition of internship experiences through their department. Less than half of the degree programs at our institution offer internship credit and many of these courses are restricted to upperclassmen who have internships that directly apply to their major. Additionally, no meaningful campus-wide elective internship credit exists to serve students in regardless of college or school.
2. Without a uniform internship credit program, students do not necessarily receive the same benefit from internship experiences across majors and departments. Studies demonstrate that internships done in coordination with faculty, a curriculum, and strategic goals produce better long-term results for students than when these elements are lacking.
3. The university does not incentivize or recognize faculty engagement in internship coursework.
4. Several states require internship credit for students to participate in unpaid internships. These states include California, New Jersey, and New York – three of the top feeder states to CU Boulder. CU Boulder has hundreds of students who want to participate in internships in these states during their summers but are not able to receive credit toward their degree. Career Services has established a single credit course through Continuing Education that suffices for the state requirement but does not count toward a student's degree requirements.
5. CU Boulder does not provide significant scholarship opportunity for unpaid internships. As a result, students who are financially unable to participate in unpaid internships may not be able to gain the basic experience required to succeed in their industry of preference. According to the ACHA National College Health Assessment, 30.1% of CU Boulder respondents reported that their finances were traumatic stressors in the previous 12 months (ACHA, 2017). These students, due to lack of funds, may then be excluded from some critical and in-demand industries

(nonprofit, government, environment, media, entertainment, music, and sports) that host unpaid internships at a rate far higher than other industries (tech, finance, and business).

The case for increased emphasis on internships at CU Boulder is rooted in the following key deliverables:

1. Retention Rates and Student Success

High-impact practices, including internships have been correlated with increased rates of retention and student engagement as well as higher reported well-being. When we encourage our students to take part in high-impact practices, we simultaneously encourage them to engage in the classroom and on campus. Furthermore, multiple experiential learning opportunities have shown to have a positive effect on students' understanding of and preparation for their futures. Internship programming is a critical tool that ought to be better utilized to drive satisfaction, engagement, and retention rates higher at CU Boulder.

2. Post-Graduate Success

Today's high school graduates are increasingly deciding their school of choice and majors with the opportunity to secure full-time work after graduation in mind. Nationwide, the majority of college students report that they would prefer their schools offer more internship and professional experiences as well as increased time focusing on career preparation (Hanover, 2016). However, according to the National Survey of Student Engagement, only 58% of students said that their experience at CU Boulder contributed to their development of work-related skills. Additionally, 61% of students reported that their experience at CU Boulder "contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in solving complex real-world problems" (NSSE, 2017). Increased emphasis on internships can improve those numbers, as CU Boulder will be directly engaged in the real-world learning experiences of our students.

There are also numerous studies indicating that employers hire interns, at least in part, to develop a recruiting pipeline for full-time positions. Employers report that they are more likely to hire students with internship experiences than without. Students and alumni report better job outcomes when they have participated in internship experiences during college. These job outcomes include less time spent searching for work, work that is more meaningful, and work that relates to students' undergraduate studies. Internships and applied learning experiences also increase the likelihood of acceptance into professional schools and graduate degree programs.

3. Alumni Engagement and Satisfaction

Alumni satisfaction with college experience has been associated with skill development, obtaining a job, and involvement as a student – all of which are products of internship programs. Post-graduate success drives positive alumni perceptions of the value of their university experience and, in turn, those alumni are more likely to donate to their alma mater. Internships also open an avenue for alumni to reengage the university through hiring and mentoring students.

4. Industry and Community Partnerships

Since June, the university's primary job board (Handshake) has had over 2,500 internships posted on it yet the majority of these potential internships will have little to no interaction with campus beyond the hiring process. This means that the university is missing the potential to engage students, employers, and community partners as they host our students for internships. Internships can serve as both a source of community building with host companies as well as entry points for those companies to engage in research, sponsorship, faculty engagement, service learning, and more activities that support CU Boulder's vision. Furthermore, by connecting internships back to curriculum at CU, we reinforce the message that when Buffs are outside of the university, they are still inseparable from the education and support they receive here. Internships also provide a unique opportunity for community members to interact with students in meaningful, positive ways which may challenge stereotypes related to typical student behavior.

5. Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Practical, applied learning in an internship is an excellent supplement to the academic learning within the classroom and labs at CU. Both learning styles, when combined, produce the conditions necessary for students to make breakthroughs, develop new ideas, and navigate new ways of thinking. By actively supporting students in their internships, we can encourage the innovative synergy of mixing university and work. Our students, community partners, and university all reap the rewards of the innovation that arises out of student work and internship experiences. Internships also provide the practical, business knowledge for students to explore entrepreneurship during and after college.

Actionable steps for increasing emphasis on internships at CU Boulder:

1. Develop internship curriculum that is accessible to all students through elective credit or credit within each department.
2. Set internship experiences as prerequisites for graduation.
3. Provide increased funding for unpaid and underpaid internship opportunities to provide equity for students who are not otherwise able to participate in those experiences.

Respectfully Submitted, Dylan Mark, Assistant Director of Employer Development, Career Services

Internship Abstracts

American College Health Association (2017). **University of Colorado Boulder: Executive Summary.** *National College Health Assessment II.*

The ACHA-National College Health Assessment II (ACHA-NCHA II) is a national research survey organized by the American College Health Association (ACHA) to assist college health service providers, health educators, counselors, and administrators in collecting data about their students' habits, behaviors, and perceptions on the most prevalent health topics. The survey is customized to the University of Colorado Boulder and provides insights into the emotional and physical well-being of students.

Coker, J. S., & Porter, D. J. (2015). **Maximizing experiential learning for student success.** *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 47(1), 66-72.*

Several years ago, Elon University set out to better understand experiential learning on campus. At the time, there was a pragmatic need to collect data that would inform revisions to the core curriculum, including an experiential-learning requirement (ELR) that had been in place since 1994. The question was whether it made sense to raise the experiential learning requirement from one to two units. So, using numerous student panels and rounds of faculty input, a relatively simple question was investigated: Does doing two or more units of experiential learning lead to better outcomes than doing only one? Since then a range of deeper research questions have been explored that might help improve the quality of experiences on campus. This article describes several major themes that cut across findings of that research. Three best practices related to experiential learning also emerged that would improve teaching and learning on many campuses: (1) provide a spectrum of experiential-learning opportunities; (2) frame experiences for broad liberal-learning outcomes; and (3) provide all students with access to each type of experience. Beginning with these broad approaches and then tailoring them for a campus's own student population appears to be an effective way to maximize experiential learning for student success.

Gallup-Purdue Index (2015). **Great Jobs, Great Lives. The Relationship Between Student Debt, Experiences and Perceptions of College Worth.** *Gallup-Purdue Index 2015 Report.*

This report explores higher education's promise to provide students a valuable education by examining two questions: Do U.S. universities provide students with opportunities and experiences equal to increasing college fees? Do students graduate well-equipped to find good jobs and prosper financially as well as pursue their passions and lead healthy, fulfilling lives?

Gohn, L.; Swartz, J.; & Donnelly, S. (2000/2001). **A case study of second year student persistence.** *Journal of College Student Retention, 2(4), 271.*

Most colleges/universities emphasize retention efforts during the first year. However, most campuses lose as many students through attrition from the second year to graduation as are lost from first to second year. Researchers at a major university in the mid-south studied second year students. Major factors relating to attrition or persistence for second year students included: 1) adjustment to stress, 2) grade satisfaction, 3) time management, 4) financial management, and 5) stabilization of career choice.

Hanover Research (2016). **2016 Workforce Readiness Survey.** *McGraw-Hill Education.*

This report presents findings from the McGraw-Hill EducaAon 2016 Workforce Readiness Survey. The primary goal of the survey is to provide a picture of how students are faring as they near graduation and prepare to enter the workforce. The findings reveal that students vary in feelings of preparedness for graduation based on year in school, major, and gender. Additionally, the survey

looks at the aspects of a college career that could be improved to increase respondents workforce readiness including internships, time for career preparation, interpersonal skills, and access to preparation tools.

Hart Research Associates (2015). **Falling short? College learning and career success.** *Washington: American Association of Colleges and Universities.*

Employers value the ability to apply learning in real-world settings and broadly endorse an emphasis on applied learning experiences in college today. 88% think that it is important for colleges and universities to ensure that all students are prepared with the skills and knowledge needed to complete an applied learning project. 73% think that requiring college students to complete a significant applied learning project before graduation would improve the quality of their preparation for careers. 60% think that all students should be expected to complete a significant applied learning project before graduating. Large majorities say they are more likely to consider a job candidate who has participated in an internship, a senior project, a collaborative research project, a field-based project in a diverse community setting with people from different backgrounds, or a community-based project.

Hull-Blanks, E.; Robinson Kurpius, S.E.; Befort, C.; Sollenberger, S.; Nicpon, N.F.; & Huser, L. (2005). **Career goals and retention-related factors among college freshmen.** *Journal of Career Development, 32(1), 16-30.*

The relationships of four types of career goals (job related, school related, value related, and unknown) with factors of school retention, academic performance, self-esteem, educational self-efficacy, and school and career commitment are studied among 401 first-semester college freshmen. Students reporting job-related goals are more likely to make positive persistence decisions than students reporting unknown goals.

Keller, K. D. (2012). **Examining internships as a high-impact educational practice (Order No. 3513475).** *Available from Education Database; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I: Social Sciences. (1027144527).*

Colleges and universities across the United States seek new, creative, and impactful ways to enhance student engagement. The study of student engagement has led to the identification of several "high-impact" educational practices that appear to generate higher levels of student performance, learning, and development than the traditional classroom experience. Internships--when done well--are among the recommended high-impact educational practices (Kuh, 2008). This qualitative study investigated internships to address the following research questions: What is the essence of internships that are done well? What are the student learning outcomes of internships that are done well? According to study participants, internships that are done well require commitment, connect the classroom to career, facilitate good communication, and provide a sense of community. In regards to resulting outcomes, internships that are done well develop the competencies of students, produce career-related crystallization, build self-confidence, and generate capital. The results suggest that when internships are done well, they can embody Kuh's six elements of high impact practices as they are effortful, include feedback, apply learning, prompt reflection, build relationships, and engage across differences. The findings of this study have the potential to assist the campus community--faculty, advisors, and career development professionals--as they help students fulfill their learning and career development goals. First, this study's findings essentially point to the need for students to demonstrate initiative and fundamental skills during internships. Second, employers must continue to be informed about what constitutes a meaningful internship experience for students. Third, universities should "scale up" high-impact educational practices like internships by

creating a developmental approach for program implementation. Furthermore, everyone in the campus community must work together to effectively facilitate internships and other high-impact educational practices.

Kuh, G.D. (2008). **High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter.** *Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.*

The following teaching and learning practices have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds. These practices take many different forms, depending on learner characteristics and on institutional priorities and contexts. On many campuses, assessment of student involvement in active learning practices such as these has made it possible to assess the practices' contribution to students' cumulative learning. However, on almost all campuses, utilization of active learning practices is unsystematic, to the detriment of student learning. Presented below are high-impact practices that educational research suggests increase rates of student retention and student engagement. The rest of this publication explores in more detail why these types of practices are effective, which students have access to them, and, finally, what effect they might have on different cohorts of students.

- First-Year Seminars and Experiences
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Writing-Intensive Courses
- Collaborative Assignments and Projects
- Undergraduate Research
- Diversity/Global Learning
- Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
- Internships
- Capstone Courses and Projects

NSSE: National Survey of Student Engagement (2017). **NSSE 2017 Snapshot: University of Colorado Boulder.** *National Survey of Student Engagement.*

Walker II, Robert Bruce. (2011). **Business internships and their relationship with retention, academic performance, and degree completion.** *Iowa State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.*

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between internships and grade point average, retention, and persistence to degree completion for business students in a private, not-for-profit, 4-year, liberal arts baccalaureate institution. Research has indicated benefits for students and schools involved in internship programs. Student retention and persistence has become an important measure of institutional efficiency. Student involvement, as well as academic and social integration, have been linked to increased retention and degree completion. A well-structured internship should increase student involvement and academic and social integration leading to increased retention, persistence, and degree completion.

Willcoxson, L. (2010). **Factors affecting intention to leave in the first, second and third year of university studies: a semester-by-semester investigation.** *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29(6), 623–639.

As most research into attrition and retention has focused on attrition during the first year of studies, we know little about the relationship between students' experience of subsequent years and their decisions to withdraw from university. This paper addresses this gap in research by examining the relationship between students' intention to withdraw from studies and their experience of university in each of the three years of studies. Factors influencing first year attrition:

- Lack of commitment to the institution
- Lack of commitment to a specific career direction or degree
- Lack of quality advising
- Social Disengagement
- Appearance of faculty as unsupportive and inaccessible

Factors influencing second year attrition:

- Health
- Finance
- Social integration
- Clarity of career direction
- Self-efficacy in relationship to academic capacity

Factors influencing third year attrition:

- Lack of sensitivity to their individual needs
- Adequate IT resources
- Planned progression to another university, especially for international students