



Outside the Classroom: An Evaluation of Equine Internships

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Introduction

With 7.2 million horses in the United States, the equine industry has major employment impact supporting over 1.7 million jobs. Of those, almost one million are working directly with horses (American Horse Council, 2018). Because of the growth in hands-on equine industry careers, students need hand-on experiences that allow them to apply their coursework.

Internships give students the opportunity to gain real-world experience. They have been shown to be beneficial in other industries such as nursing and business. Equine internships have been scarcely

researched with only one study that evaluated internship experience (Anderson, 2015). This study explored student perceptions of their equine internship experiences. **We hypothesized that equine internships would be perceived as valuable, and participants would relate that value with compensation, skill acquisition, networking, and job offers.**



Materials and Methods

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Middle Tennessee State University. An online survey was developed and administered using Qualtrics, a survey creation software that allows data collection, storage, and analysis. The survey was distributed to equine and animal science programs nationwide and shared via social media. The survey included demographics and questions to determine respondents' perceived value of their equine internship. Participation in an equine internship within ten years and completion of 75% of questions were the criteria for inclusion. Of 228 respondents, 186 met the criteria for inclusion. Data were examined using frequency counts, correlations, and chi-square contingency tables (SAS 9.4).

Results

Results showed a wide range of industry areas in which respondents participated in internships. Breeding (28%) was the most common and western training and performance (18%) was the second most common reported. Housing and compensation did not affect whether respondents would recommend their internship ($P=0.61$); however, internship value tended to be rated higher when housing ($P=0.075$) or compensation ($P=0.057$) were included. Of respondents, 47% indicated they were offered a job with that farm or company upon completion of the internship, and 50% of the respondents claimed their internship helped them get a different job in their area of interest. Networking was highly correlated with perceived value and 83% of respondents indicated they were able to build valuable connections.

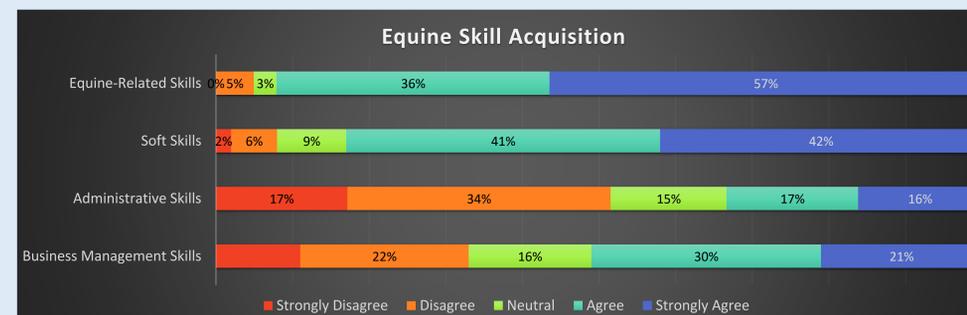


Figure 1: Level of agreement to the statement "I learned new equine related skills during my internship", and similar statements regarding soft skills, administrative skills and business management skills.

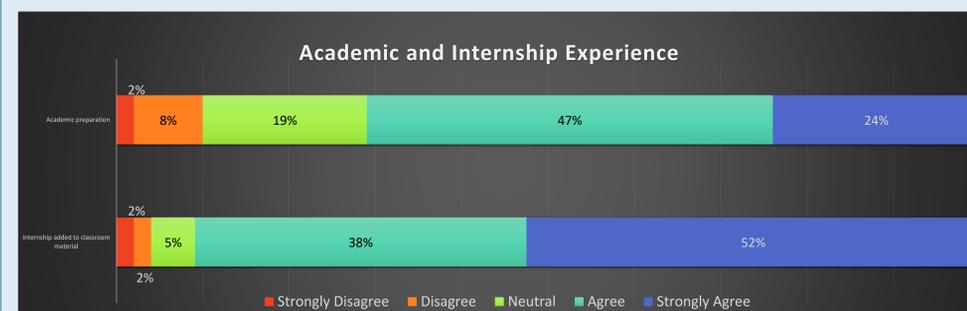


Figure 2: Level of agreement to the statement "my academic program helped prepare me for this internship experience", and "my internship experience added to what I have learned in the classroom."

Results Continued

Perceived Value X Internship Components	P	R
Equine-Related Skills	<0.0001	0.49
Horse Handling Skills	0.0001	0.29
Riding and Training Skills	0.0006	0.25
Operating Machinery Skills	0.0009	0.25
Soft Skills	<0.0001	0.57
Business Management Skills	<0.0001	0.37
Customer Relation Skills	<0.0001	0.36
Administration Skills	<0.0001	0.29
Networking Opportunities	<0.0001	0.75
Career Exploration	<0.0001	0.51
Job offer from internship farm or company	0.0016	0.24
Job offer from different farm or company	<0.0001	0.32

Table 1: Significant correlations between respondents' perceived value of internship and different opportunities within internship experiences. Overall, 91% of respondents felt their internship was valuable.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that equine internships are highly valuable and can be used as a tool to prepare students for careers in the industry. Internships lead to opportunities to explore different careers, network with industry professionals, and gain skills that make students valuable to employers. Not only did respondents gain industry specific skills like horse handling, but they gained soft skills like communication and teamwork. An overwhelming percentage felt their internship was valuable and they would recommend it to other students.

Conclusion

As hypothesized, respondents found their internships to be valuable and that value correlated with compensation, skill acquisition, networking, and job offers. Colleges can use this information to better prepare students for their internship experience and assist students in determining if they want to participate in an internship. Internship programs can use this information to evaluate their curriculum and ensure they are effective in preparing students for the workforce.

References

- American Horse Council. 2018. Economic Impact of the U.S. Horse Industry. American Horse Council Foundation, Washington, DC.
Anderson, K. P., 2015. Evaluation of undergraduate equine related internship experience by students and employers. NACTA J. 59(3): 234.