



The background features a large, dark blue circle on the right and a smaller, bright pink circle on the left. Overlaid on these are various handwritten phrases in black and pink ink, including "Allanwell", "chris", "giving", "help", "people", and "writing".

Women Students Making Connections Through Community Writing Internships

MARGARET THOMAS EVANS, Ph.D. // INDIANA UNIVERSITY EAST

This paper explores the benefits to women students at a small regional university of completing a community writing internship as part of their undergraduate or graduate education in English. The focus is on female students as over 70% of our students are female and many of them are tied to the local community and desire to remain here and seek employment after graduation. It provides excerpts from interviews with students who discuss the value of their internship experience working with a community partner. Internships conducted in collaboration with community agencies build capacity and knowledge for students and the community in which they work, allowing students to explore tangible writing and research experiences, rather than simply practice exercises that are offered in the classroom. Through this opportunity, female students generate concrete outcomes for community partners and acquire new research, writing, and professional skills, which may result in ongoing relationships with their community partners that last beyond the terms of the internship. This study considers whether internships should be required, or at least recommended, of all English majors at this regional university to assist them in their long term goal of finding employment after graduation in an area with limited employment opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

According to Bay (2006), in her article, “Preparing Undergraduates for Careers: An Argument for the Internship Practicum,” there has been a lack of attention to the value of internships for English majors (p.135). Many universities offer internships as a form of service-learning for both undergraduate and graduate students, and scholars have written about the benefits of community engagement and service-learning for students (Cushman, 1996; Julier, Livingston and Goldblatt, 2014; McEachern, 2001; Youngblood and Mackiewicz, 2013). Even less has been written about the benefits to community partners and their role in working with student interns (Cruz and Giles 2000; Goertzen, Greenleaf, and Dougherty 2016). At the regional university where I teach, my department offers both for credit and not for credit internships to our undergraduate and graduate students as well as service learning opportunities in many classes. While not required for a degree, some students select to complete an internship as an elective. Typically these are unpaid internships, largely due to the fact that small local non-profits or businesses cannot afford to provide compensation; however, students may apply for and potentially be awarded internship scholarships from the university.

In this study, I explore the benefits to women students in English of completing an internship and the potential outcomes for their community partners. My work begins with the basic premise that internships, as a form of service-learning, are valuable to students. Internships conducted in collaboration with community agencies build capacity and knowledge for students and the community in which they work, allowing students to explore tangible writing and research experiences, in addition to practice exercises that are offered in the classroom. Through this opportunity, students generate concrete outcomes for community partners and acquire new research, writing, and professional skills, which may result in ongoing relationships with their community partners that last beyond the terms of the internship.

In response to the ubiquitous question—from students, parents, and others—regarding the long-term benefits of their English degree, students completing an internship may have an experience-based, informed answer that those who do not complete an internship would lack. The internship has shown them how to apply their writing, critical thinking, and research skills. It may also have introduced them to networking opportunities and provided them with the experience they need to acquire a job post-graduation.

Similar to students in Bay's study at Purdue University (2006), students at my institution take a for-credit course if they want academic credit for their work. All students, whether they are completing the internship for credit or not, must undergo a thorough review process. Before they are ever sent out to a community partner, two members of faculty interview potential students to make sure the student is aware of the responsibilities and expectations of being an intern and representing the university in a public forum. The faculty members instruct students on how to behave, how to dress, and how to represent the institution, with stress on professionalism. One of the faculty members also contacts our institution's office of Career Services to work with the Internship Coordinator to ensure that the student completes the university's internship requirements.

When a student is partnered with a community organization—typically non-profits or small businesses in the community—a faculty member serves as a liaison between the university, the community partner, and the student. The faculty member introduces the student to the partner and meets with both of them before the internship

commences. Both the student and the partner must understand their respective roles, the hours a student is expected to work, and the tasks the student will be expected to complete. The faculty member continues to meet with the student throughout the internship and should any issues arise, he or she can work with the partner. The student is expected not only to complete the research and writing tasks required by the community partner, but also to keep a journal of her experiences throughout the internship which is regularly submitted to the faculty member. At the end of the internship the student writes a reflective essay about the experience and may also be interviewed by the faculty member. Finally, the student and the community partner each complete an evaluation of the internship as required by the university's office of Career Services.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Limited research is available about internships in English although a few scholars have explored the value of internships for students. None of the sources addressed focus specifically on female students (Tovey, 2001; Bourelle, 2012 and 2014; Savage and Seibele, 2010). Even less research has been published regarding the benefits to community partners of hosting student interns.

Tinkler et al. list the major points to consider from the perspective of the community partner (2014). Students, faculty, and community partners need to be aware of the mission, goals, resources, and work of the partnership. There is significant pedagogical value placed in engaging writing students outside of the classroom in various types of projects. Whether service-learning, internships, or other forms of community-engaged writing, "When students engage with audiences, projects, and purposes outside of the classroom, they are able to wrestle with, analyze, revise, and produce variations of discourse in ways sometimes presumed not possible in a classroom" (Julier, Livingston and Goldblatt, 2014, p. 57).

John Rigsby et al. (2013) claim, "There has been a paucity of empirical studies examining the relationship between internships and job opportunities, which is a primary reason why students enter internship programs, schools establish them, and employers hire interns" (p. 1131). Students, especially those in the fields of English and Humanities, whose degree programs may not obviously lead to a "job,"

want this opportunity to expose them to real-life writing opportunities. They come away from the experience more aware of what they can do with the skills acquired through their completed coursework. Therefore, I would argue that students need the opportunity to develop skills directly related to their educational experience and their future professional aspirations. Internships, along with other forms of service learning, are one way of working on those skills.

Janice Tovey (2001) connects the internship experience to the development of relationships between the academy and the workplace in her study at East Carolina University. She also provides pointers on creating successful internship programs for professional writing and communication students. Tovey (2001) points out that “Besides resume items, career opportunities, and job prospects, students benefit from experiential learning by gaining knowledge of how organizations work” (p. 231). The internship program at her institution is similar to the one at my institution. While completing an internship is not required for majors, it is strongly encouraged and shares similar goals of providing students with experiences that they cannot gain in the classroom coursework alone. Deborah Carlin (2002), writing about the internship program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, focuses on the need for internships for graduate students, arguing that they are necessary because many graduate students in English, who may desire to teach, will find that there are limited opportunities for full-time employment in teaching. We should not assume, however, that all graduate students in English MA programs desire a job in teaching. Consequently, Carlin (2002) argues, “We are...obligated to consider their [graduate students] economic and professional welfare after they leave our institutions. Internship programs can lead to employment after graduate school and at the very least they provide real experience in a nonacademic field, experience that is a necessity in most job searches today” (p. 217). Students reported that their internship experience was both a talking point and an avenue for gaining employment or other opportunities.

Carlin (2001) further reports, “Our internship placements are in professions that our students might actually want to pursue, such as publishing; work in museums, historical societies, or nonprofit humanities organizations; academic administration; and educational consulting” (p. 221). Likewise, at my university, we place students at museums, newspapers, law offices, and environmental centers. In the past five years,

we have placed at least eleven female students with these community partners. At each of these locations, students have been involved in various kinds of writing and research. Some of them have gone on to careers in similar types of work environments.

Given the job market, English departments should consider integrating internships with community-based partners early in an academic program for graduate students (since MA programs are typically two years and students need to think early about their post-graduation plans) and late in an academic program for undergraduates (after students have acquired the necessary skills to successfully complete one or more internships). Perhaps it would be advisable to require or strongly recommend an internship of all students unless they are already employed in a professional capacity and therefore do not need or want an internship.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to describe the potential value to both female students and community partners of completing/hosting internships and to consider whether or not internships should, in the future, be required or recommended of majors at my institution. There is a significant investment of time for the partner (who is benefiting from the work students complete but ideally needs to provide training and support) and for faculty mentors (who work one on one with students). We offer both an undergraduate course and a graduate course for students in which they must enroll if they want to complete the internship for academic credit. The credit hours may vary, but they are typically three or four credits, respectively. Internships require students to spend approximately 10 hours per week over a sixteen week semester working for the organization or business, either on-site or off-site depending on the particular community partner and its needs and available space. Students also complete course assignments for their professor as discussed previously.

METHODOLOGY

Female students in English who completed internships from 2012 through 2016 were contacted via email to participate in this IRB approved research study. These dates were selected as I mentored my first undergraduate student intern in the summer of 2012; my most recent student intern worked during the summer of 2016. During this

time frame, only one male student completed an internship. He was mentored by another faculty member. Of the students who completed internships during this time, I mentored five of them: Elizabeth (at the Historical Museum), Christine, Lily, and Lucy (all at the Environmental Center), and Susan (at the Language School).

Those students who agreed to be interviewed received a consent form and the questions via email. Students were asked questions about what kind of experiences they had as interns and how they believe they benefited from completing an internship. Each student was either interviewed in a face-to-face appointment or provided responses to the questions via email, depending on availability and geographic location. Not all of the students currently reside within a reasonable driving distance to campus. Two of the students provided email responses; the others met with me in person. Their responses appear in the findings section. One student declined to participate in the study; two students did not respond to requests for an interview. Note: all names of students used in the following figure (Figure 1) and discussion have been changed to protect the students' privacy.

Students who provided email responses wrote lengthy, detailed comments about their experiences. The open format provided by email exchanges offered the opportunity for follow-up questions which I asked in some instances. Elizabeth, who had the opportunity to complete two internships during her academic career, wrote about both of her internships (as seen in Figure 1). When I met with students for face-to-face interviews, they answered the questions but also elaborated on their experiences. The face-to-face interview provided a rich conversation. I did not ask additional questions although at times I asked for clarification or more details.

Figure 1 lists the type of community partner and primary responsibility of the interns along with the pseudonyms used in the study. Note: the specific names of community partner organizations are not included for privacy. A generic type of organization is listed. I refer only to the organization, not to any specific individual working at the organization.

Community Partner	Primary Responsibility	Student	Level
Local Newspaper	Feature Writer	Hazel	Undergraduate
Historical Museum	Creative Writer	Tabitha	Undergraduate
Pro-Bono Law Office	Writer	Ophelia	Undergraduate
Historical Museum	Researcher/Writer	Elizabeth	Undergraduate
Environmental Center	Grant Writer	Christine	Undergraduate
Symphony Orchestra	Grant Writer	Elizabeth	Undergraduate
Historical Museum	Professional Writer	Heather	Undergraduate
Environmental Center	Grant Writer	Lily	Undergraduate
Pro-Bono Law Office	Researcher/Writer	Mary	Graduate
Environmental Center	Researcher/Grant Writer	Lucy	Undergraduate
Historical Museum	Researcher/Writer	Jane	Undergraduate
Language School	Researcher/Grant Writer	Susan	Undergraduate

Figure 1. English Internship Placements.

FINDINGS

Seven students were interviewed and the following data offers insights from their experiences during their internships. They were asked the following questions:

Question 1:

Why did you decide to complete an internship as part of your academic work?

Question 2:

What did you expect to accomplish through your internship?

Question 3:

What type of research and writing did you complete for your internship?

Question 4:

Did you mostly work independently or did you receive a lot of supervision?

Question 5:

Did you receive any training from your community partner?

Question 6:

What benefits do you feel you gained from your internship experience?

Question 7:

How have they impacted you since graduating or how do you anticipate they might impact you?

All respondents stated several of the following reasons for completing an internship: an internship provides opportunities outside of the classroom, makes them well-rounded, expands on their work experiences, allows them to polish and learn new skills, provides opportunities to make meaningful connections, and gives the option to work alongside a professional in a field of interest. In general, students hoped to learn new skills, complete writing and research projects, and enhance their networking opportunities. Research and writing for all internships, except for the local newspaper, involved grant writing and developing resources, data collection, pursuing funding for non-profits, creating databases, updating sponsor information, and creating professional documents. Students reported that at the beginning, perhaps the first week or two, they worked partly under the supervision of their host organization, typically with one individual assigned to them, so they could learn about the organization and what was expected of them. All the students said that once acclimated to the organization and role, they worked independently. No formal training, such as workshops or guidelines, was provided by any organization. For the most part, other than occasional meetings or emails with their supervisors, the students were engaged in primarily independent work. In some cases they received limited guidance and few materials to use. Students reported gaining knowledge and experience in working with the public through customer service in the pro-bono law office, developed professional contacts and learned how to network, gained valuable experience to include on their résumés, learned how an organizational board worked, developed professional skills to use outside of university, gained personal success through knowing their abilities, and grew significantly in their self-confidence.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is the only student who completed two internships; she is currently in graduate school at another institution. Elizabeth said that she decided to complete two internships during her time as an undergraduate student because she wanted to leave school as a well-rounded young woman, and to her, being a successful student is about more than grades. She believed that any outside experience that students can get is valuable. She wanted to feel confident and ready for the next step in her life. She further added that some experiences can only be acquired outside the classroom. Elizabeth indicated that she “hoped to learn about grant writing for a non-profit.” Elizabeth wrote articles for the local museum to be used as marketing tools, and she also assisted in organizing archival collections. She also interned for a local symphony orchestra performing a variety of tasks. Elizabeth said, “The benefits are truly endless. I made important networking connections with people in possible fields of interest for me in the future who I can now ask for references.... I learned how to work in a professional environment outside of college, and also gained a variety of invaluable skills that could be useful for many, many different jobs. ...Participating in internships helped me learn what kind of job I want in the future, expanded my skills and just gave me more confidence in my ability to be a successful woman in the professional world after my academic studies [are] completed.” Elizabeth also stated, “I learned how to be a confident leader through my various leadership positions and also through being a student intern. I am sure my internship experiences will continue to impact me in a positive way as I move forward. Internships helped me get my new job, and I hope they will help me get into graduate school as well.”

Tabitha

Tabitha, who also interned at the historical museum, said she wanted to learn more about archival research, writing articles, and the way a non-profit operates. She completed research on the historical events surrounding the founding of the town where our university is located and wrote several chapters of a historical narrative to be used locally to teach 4th through 6th grade students about the history of their community. This project is still in progress. Tabitha commented, “My internship created the possibility of future writing; it gave me the confidence to know I could be a writer or editor.”

Ophelia and Mary

Ophelia and Mary both interned at a Pro-Bono law office. In addition to other tasks, Ophelia created forms to be used for applications for legal aid purposes. She indicated that she realized that participation in an internship program would provide more opportunities to expand upon her previous work experiences. Ophelia noted that she “expected to accomplish many different goals.” She hoped to increase her visibility in the professional world through participating in the internship, increase her knowledge and skills through polishing and learning new ones, but she also wanted to try something new.

Ophelia said she did not receive much training from her community partner. She elaborated that he was too busy to devote much time to her. Ophelia added that she gained more knowledge and experience in handling the public through customer service in a professional environment and added more professional contacts. Significantly, Ophelia commented, “My experiences in my internships were so great that I highly recommend them to any person I know who is going to school.”

At the Pro-Bono office, Mary (a graduate student) completed extensive research on grant opportunities. She also wanted to learn some skills and develop networking opportunities in the community. Mary went on site every Friday for about 4 hours to meet with her supervisor. They typically spent 30 minutes discussing what needed to be done, and sometimes attended events in the community to network, but most of the time Mary worked alone. Mary said she “figured most things out for herself.” She was given one sample grant to use as a guide for writing future grants. Mary added, “I can put this on my CV. I also learned how an organizational cycle runs and how the Board works....It was an eye-opener.” Mary believes that internships “lead to new avenues.” They could be “volunteer work, part time jobs, or serving on a board. They also provide references for future employment.” After she graduated, Mary was offered a part-time position at the Pro-Bono Office – she went on to accept the offer.

Lucy

Lucy indicated that she decided to complete an internship to finish her undergraduate career because she wanted some real-life experience in what she spent five years studying (technical writing). Although she completed some projects

that were actually used, this was her first experience in the technical and professional writing field. Lucy said, “I expected to figure out how to build the bridge between what I have learned academically and its application in the workforce. As a virtual intern, I also wanted to get an idea of what it is like to work independently, as freelance writing has always been a consideration of mine.” Lucy completed extensive research on funding opportunities for a local non-profit environmental center. She created a database of information and went on to write a grant. Lucy stated, “I used my technical writing skills in the creation of my grants database. I had to include as much information as possible, while still creating an aesthetically clear and functional product. I definitely got practice on decreasing wordiness, which has always been a struggle of mine!”

Lucy was an intern at the environmental center and initially met with her contact person; however, after that she worked off site, partly due to a lack of space and computer for her at the center and partly to meet her schedule. She needed to work outside the typical 9 to 5 hours at the center as she had a full-time job elsewhere and a small child at home. Lucy noted, “I learned how crucial time management is for an independent project. I also got a lot of practice using Microsoft Excel. The most important benefit I gained was in the research. It was the first time I have ever completed such a large-scale project, and I feel better prepared for the next time around. I think that every college student nearing the end of an undergraduate journey should complete an internship. It is a great way to start connecting college with a future career, while giving just one peek into what that degree could mean professionally.” Lucy also added, “I feel more prepared should I choose to go into freelance writing. I would also be more comfortable working on a long-term project involving a lot of research where I would work mostly independently.”

Susan

Susan, who interned at a language school, mentioned that the internship opportunity was suggested to her by a professor. She said, “I wanted to take advantage of the time I would have over the summer to gain real work experience and new skills.” Susan expected to learn how to research and write grant proposals. She mentioned that she knew almost nothing about grant writing, so she started by reading *Grant Writing for Dummies*. She also read several articles online about how to be a grant

writer. She researched potential grantors to figure out what grantors look for in a grantee, how to apply, and so on. Then she wrote a template for two types of grant proposals. Susan worked almost entirely independently. Her community partner met with her in person once to explain what he expected of her and they continued to communicate online and over the phone mostly to share her progress and obtain the information she needed. Susan noted, “I learned how to research and write grant proposals. I learned a lot about how a non-profit organization functions. I developed my professional writing and communication skills, and I learned how to web conference. I learned several new functions of Microsoft Excel. I also gained a great deal of confidence in my ability to work independently and problem solve.” Susan believes that understanding how to apply for grants is a very useful skill for any college student. She doesn’t know if she will ever need to write a grant proposal for an organization again, but she plans to teach college English, so it is certainly possible. She also commented that the internship looks great on her CV. Most of her experience is academic or creative, so it was very important to her to have this professional writing and research experience.

Hazel

Hazel, who wrote for the local newspaper, was trained to gather information from sources, write articles, and take photographs. She had several bylines for her work. Hazel said, “I wanted to learn to write for the public and get my work published.” Hazel worked alone at the newspaper once a story was assigned to her. She submitted her work based on a deadline after she had completed each piece. Hazel added, “It gave me more confidence in my ability to be a successful woman in the professional world after my academic studies were completed.”

Students who completed internships went on to other opportunities: further education, career placements, or both. One currently works as an advisor at a university; one served in an AmeriCorps Vista program in a local community; one served the local arts community in an administrative capacity; several went on to graduate programs. As mentioned, one student received a part-time job offer from her non-profit organization.

Community Partners

Community partners indicated, prior to agreeing to host interns, that they would not be able to provide much supervision or training for student interns; they would assign them tasks and respond to email or in person questions, as appropriate, but mostly expected them to be able to work independently. With that understanding, the community partners and faculty mentors agreed to the internships. The lack of supervision might have challenged some students and was initially difficult for some of the interns as they learned the organization and its culture. Once they settled into the work and understood what was required of them, the students handled independent work with limited oversight well. They were all highly competent writers and strong researchers. Students were carefully selected and internship assignments considered thoughtfully by faculty before students were sent out to work. Once assigned a specific task, they each created a work plan and followed it. All interns were required to check in every week or two with their faculty mentor, so any potential problems could be addressed quickly. No intervention was necessary— this is better than had been.

Community partners welcome the idea of having additional help due to limited staff and hope students will be able to complete tasks to which they have not been able to attend. They also want to support the university and be valuable partners. They genuinely want students to have opportunities outside the classroom that might be beneficial. Student interns have been able to complete tasks that the respective organizations did not have the staff or time to complete. Student interns have created research databases of potential grant funding organizations and completed grant proposals (Environmental Center, Language School, and Pro-Bono Office); they also wrote a variety of documents (stories for the newspaper, brochures and other documents for the Historical Museum).

Interns received limited training/supervision. The Historical Museum in particular was apologetic about not being able to offer more training or supervision although the Director did answer questions when students were onsite, and he reported in conversations with faculty that he checked in with the students to see how they were getting along. Students at the Pro-Bono Office received a little training and supervision, primarily at the beginning of the internship to get them started on their tasks. They had weekly meetings to check in. Likewise, the students at the

Environmental Center and the Language School received some basic instructions on the tasks expected of them, and then they were left to work on their own. They almost exclusively corresponded via email.

The students mostly worked independently either on site or remotely. The interns placed at the Historical Museum worked on site as they needed access to the artifacts and archives at the facility. They worked in a back room which contained tables/chairs and boxes of archives. The interns working for the Pro-Bono Office primarily worked remotely although they did meet with the community partner onsite weekly. One of the students, Mary, also accompanied the lawyer to meetings in the community. This allowed her to network locally. The interns working at the Environmental Center initially met with the community partner onsite, but after that they worked remotely. This was partly due to a lack of space for them to work onsite and also to fit the hours the interns were available to work. The Environmental Center maintains business hours (9 to 5) and interns placed there had other jobs at the same time or were not local. The intern who worked at the Language School worked independently offsite; she met once with the organization leader early in the semester. The student lived about an hour away from the location, so it was more convenient to work offsite and communicate via email or phone with the organization when she had questions. The student intern at the local newspaper went to the office on the days she worked; however, most of her work was then completed offsite, either gathering information for stories or writing those stories.

Each organization has indicated it is willing to continue hosting interns and finds them to be highly valuable; however, they all have the ongoing stipulation that they can only offer limited supervision and little to no specific training. The community partners indicated that the interns have the potential to have a significant impact on the fundraising for the organization because of the research and database work they completed (Environmental Center and Pro-Bono Office). The Historical Museum had interns who wrote documents, such as brochures and placards, about the museum that could be used for visitors to learn about various exhibits and indicated that this was useful to draw attention to specific displays. One student started work on a novella about local history. It has not yet been completed. If it is completed later, then it might be used to teach local history to grade-school children.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This is a small study; seven female students agreed to participate in this study out of the possible eleven who completed an internship during the time frame of the study. The results of the student interviews demonstrate a positive experience for all students who participated. Despite the fact that most received only limited supervision and worked alone much of the time, they all believed their internships would help them in future employment – by helping them understand the process of acquiring a position, by completing relevant freelance projects, or by actually working on the job site. Those who completed internships indicated they thought the experience would help/had helped in finding employment or provided insight as to how they might perform freelance work as a writer. The students benefited by forming community relationships/connections and considered the service learning internship to be a valuable endeavor which they would recommend to others. The student who received a job offer certainly appreciated the value of her internship. She is also grateful for the opportunity to contribute to her community. Her community partner benefited from having her work for the organization for a semester and will continue to develop that relationship as she works as an employee.

The students put in a lot of time and effort to achieve their community partner's goals. Although most of the organizations were not able to provide significant training or supervision, they were all pleased with the work students performed based on evaluations that they completed for each of the students. All of the students who participated thus far in internships have been comfortable working independently and knew they could contact their community partner with questions as they arose. If they had any concerns, they could also work with their faculty mentor to resolve them. It would likely be more beneficial to students to receive training from community partners at the beginning of their internships; however, the students indicated that they enjoyed being forced to think for themselves and figure things out. Once they got involved with their work, the lack of training did not seem to be an issue as long as the community partner responded to emails. Students are able to research and build databases – typically of potential grant funding organizations relevant to the organizations; complete grant applications; create documents; and write reports and articles. They clearly applied their classroom-based learning to real world experiences, such as writing proposals, articles, and brochures, and conducting

research. All of these skills will be helpful in gaining future opportunities, whether they are in careers which will require them to research and write or in further education. All of the women who agreed to participate in this study have gone on to find employment using skills they developed during their internships or they have gone on to further education (masters or doctoral work). Perhaps they would have followed these paths even without the internships; however, the internship definitely increased their self-confidence and demonstrated to them that they could accomplish the tasks required of them. They could also include it on a résumé and talk about it during an interview.

As the English department continues to offer internships and works to grow the program, further studies should be conducted to build a more comprehensive set of data on the benefits of internships to undergraduate and graduate students and to community partners. As noted above, students went on to other opportunities and one was hired by her internship partner; some used both their internship experience and contacts/references as they sought future placements. All of those who participated in the research indicated that the experience benefited them, personally and professionally. Therefore, it would be helpful to continue offering internships, to as many students as possible, and to work to expand the opportunity to more students with a goal of requiring or recommending an internship of all undergraduate majors (unless they are already employed in the field) and encouraging additional graduate students to seriously consider an internship as part of their program of study, especially if their goals do not include a future teaching position. It would also be necessary for the success of such an expanded program to solicit further community partners with whom the students could work. This will require extensive effort by the faculty who wish to promote community internships and mentor students in such a program. Employment is a crucial concern in the region due to the economic decline and the limited options available to our graduating students. Unless they relocate to a larger city, students find great difficulty in securing employment using their education and skills.

Internships provide the department a means to show students the many ways they can use an English degree in their future careers and personal lives. Not all students who earn degrees in English wish to acquire teaching credentials and become teachers. Many are seeking other forms of employment. Internships are of particular

value in discovering what types of jobs are available to them either in their communities or potentially elsewhere. Graduate students earning an MA might want to teach; however, there are limited opportunities to teach at the college level except as adjuncts. They could seek certification to teach K-12, but teaching may not be their goal. They might want to be employed in other fields. Students may have pursued an English degree with a concentration in technical or professional writing and they may want to work as professional or technical writers or editors. Completing an internship in one or more of these fields will give them first-hand experience performing the kind of work they may seek after graduation.

Offering students the option of an internship (or multiple internships) allows them to explore opportunities in the community, network with various groups, and develop critical thinking, writing, communication skills, and many other valuable strengths that may assist them in their future plans. These skills also benefit the community partners, especially if they are hired by them, or by other local organizations.

Internships separate a student from the crowd of degree-endowed students. Employers may look more favorably on applicants that come to them with experience, and internships are an excellent way to accomplish this. Some students are able to complete one or more internships while in school; others may have to wait until they graduate, but it is not too late to complete one post-graduation. Graduates may find short term opportunities to complete—possibly working full time hours—and that may help them secure employment at that organization or another.

As universities, especially small regional universities in areas where employment is difficult to secure, continue to explore their relationships with their local community partners, student internships can have tremendous potential for supporting research and knowledge-based needs of local community partners, while providing valuable skills and training to a cohort of students who bring their academic research and writing skills to create real world solutions. The results presented in this study demonstrate the benefits to a small number of female students electing to engage in internships and to the community partner organizations they served.

References

- Bay, J. (2006). Preparing undergraduates for careers: an argument for the internship practicum. *College English*, 69 (2), 134-141.
- Bourelle, T. (2012). Bridging the gap between the technical communication classroom and the internship: teaching social consciousness and real-world writing. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 42 (2), 183-197.
- Bourelle, T. (2014). New perspectives on the technical communication internship: Professionalism in the Workplace." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 44 (2), 171-189.
- Carlin, D. (2002). Graduate internship programs in the humanities: a report from one university. *Pedagogy*, 2 (2), 213-228.
- Cushman, E. (1996). The rhetorician as agent of social change. *College Composition and Communication*, 47 (1), 7-28.
- Cushman, E. (2002). Sustainable service learning programs. *College Composition and Communication*, 64 (1), 40-65.
- Cruz, N. I. & Giles, D. E. (2000). Where's the community in service-learning research? *Michigan Journal of Community Service and Learning*, 7 (1), 28-34.
- Goertzen, B. J., Greenleaf, J. & Dougherty, D. (2016). Exploring the community impact of service-learning project teams. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*, 7 (2), 37-50.
- Julier, L., Livingston, K., & Goldblatt, E. (2014). Community-engaged pedagogies. In Tate, G., Rupier Taggart, A., & Hessler, H. B. (Eds), *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford UP.
- McEachern, R. W. (2001). Problems in service learning and technical/professional writing: incorporating the perspective of nonprofit management. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 10 (2), 211-224.
- Rigsby, J., Addy, N., Herring, C., & Polledo, D. (2013). An examination of internships and job opportunities. *Journal of Applied Business Research*, 29 (4), 1131-1143.
- Savage, G. J., & Seibele M. K. (2010). Technical communication internship requirements in the academic economy: how we compare among ourselves and across other applied fields. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, 40 (1), 51-75.
- Tinkler, A., Tinkler, B., Housman, E. & Strouse, G. T. (2014). Key elements of effective service-learning partnerships from the perspective of community partners. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*, 5 (2), 137-152.
- Tovey, J. (2001). Building connections between industry and university: implementing an internship program at a regional university. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 10 (2), 225-239.
- Youngblood, S. A., & Mackiewicz, J. (2013). Lessons in service learning: developing the service learning opportunities in technical communication (SLOT-C) database. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 22 (3), 260-283.