

Perceptions of Internships in an Agricultural Associate Degree Program

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Does your department have a formal internship program for your students?

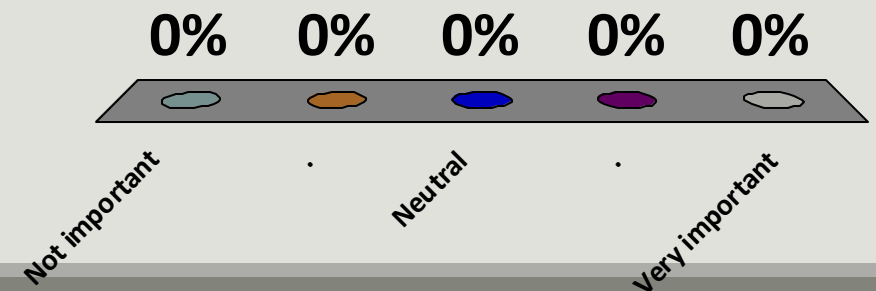
A. Yes

B. No



How important do you think internships are for Agriculture degree programs?

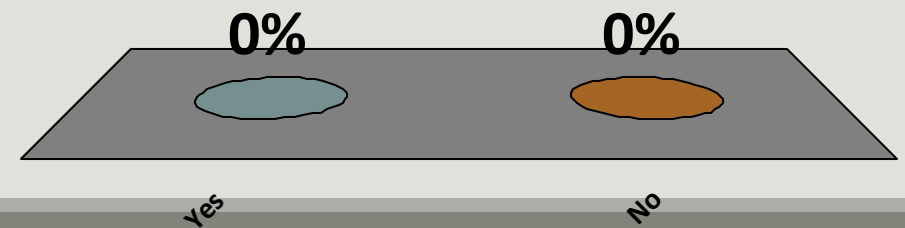
1. Not important
2. Somewhat unimportant
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat important
5. Very important



Do internships provide enough value to justify requiring them for graduation?

A. Yes

B. No



Our Inspiration

- The Ag Institute is interested in starting an Internship Program.
- Internships are not a current requirement of the program; however it has been implemented.... and failed in the past.
- There is a high interest from stakeholders and administrators are already committed to it.
- Increasing non traditional enrollment
- Do we have support from the faculty?



Benefits of Internship Programs

- Allows students to earn academic credit and additional income and develop personal and technical skills
- Build a network of employment contacts/employment opportunities
- Connect students academic learning to real-world experiences (Stanford University, 2014)
- Allows exploration of career options, interests, and abilities (University of Washington, 2009)

Challenges of Internship Programs

- Require huge time and money commitment
- Finding the correct internships for students
- Paid/Unpaid Internships
- Supervisors are too busy for interns (Bukaliya, 2012)
- Different expectations of workloads from students, employers, and teachers (Swinburne University)

Our Approach

Modified survey (Wu, 2001) was used to determine the benefits, barriers, and importance of incorporating an internship program.

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame of the study was 42 faculty members of the Agricultural Institute. Twenty-two individuals completed the survey for a 52% response rate.

Findings

- On a 5 point likert scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*), respondents recognized the benefits of internships (\bar{x} = 4.15)
- Professors see several barriers in creating an internship program.
- They are conflicted about whether internships should be required for graduation (\bar{x} = 3.52).
- There were no significant correlations between perceptions and demographics of professors.

Perceptions of College Professors on the Benefits of Internships

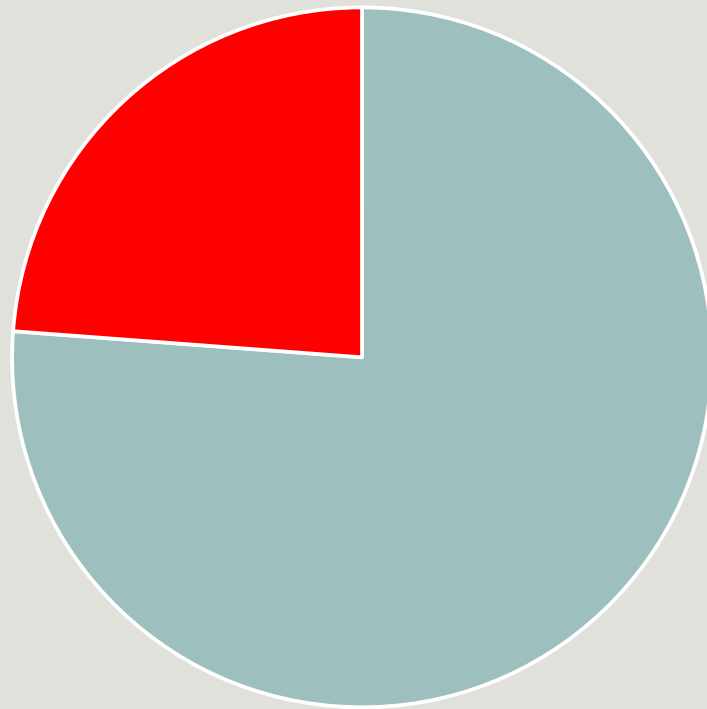
Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	n	Mean
Internships provide real life experiences for students			1	4	16	21	4.71
Internships improve student mastery of course objectives		1	4	8	8	21	4.09
Internships develop better "soft" skills for students such as communication, leadership etc			4	5	12	21	4.38
Internships get students started in an agricultural career			4	8	9	21	4.24
I encourage students to participate in internships			6	4	11	21	4.24
Internships allow students to realize and analyze their career goals			2	7	12	21	4.48
Internships enhance my classroom teaching	2	1	6	7	5	21	3.57
Internships address the changing concerns of non-traditional students	1	2	6	5	7	21	3.71
Internships should be a part of the degree curriculum.	1	2	4	4	10	21	3.95
						21	$\bar{x}=4.15$

Perceptions of College Professors on the Barriers of Internships

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	n	Mean
★ Student commitments to family businesses or other jobs		2	3	9	7	21	4.00
★ Students will not want to work unpaid internships		3	1	8	9	21	4.10
Finding the time to help students find an internship	2	4	2	9	4	21	3.43
Limited Student Interest		6	7	6	2	21	3.19
Limited Industry Contacts	2	6	2	9	2	21	3.14
Lack of a systematic way to translate experiential learning into academic credit		7	4	6	4	21	3.33
Lack of administrative support for paperwork	1	7	4	7	2	21	3.10
Lack of funding	0	5	5	7	4	21	3.48
Lack of peer faculty support for the whole idea of internships	0	7	6	6	2	21	3.14
Feel that students are unprepared to be sent out into internships	3	8	3	7		21	2.67
Lack of pay to supervise students in the summer (10 month employee)		3	4	7	7	21	3.86

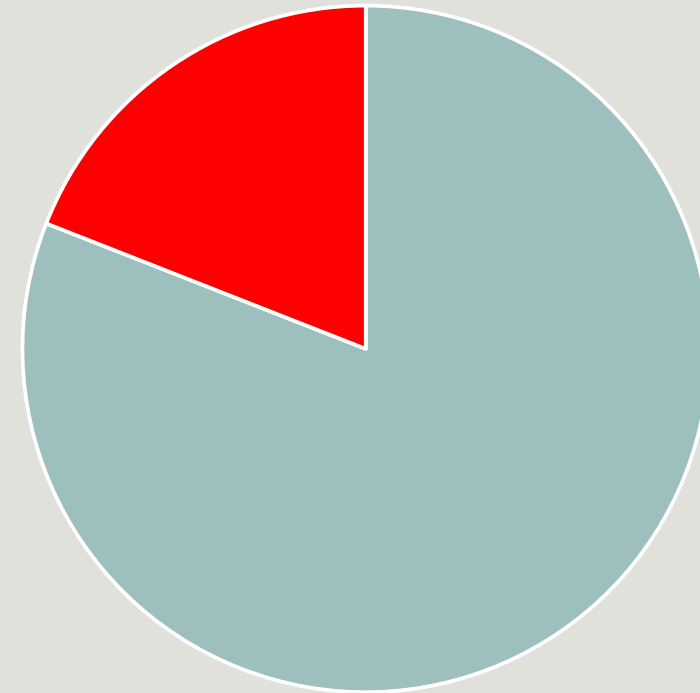
Strongest Barriers for Internships

Student Commitments



■ Agree ■ Disagree/Neutral

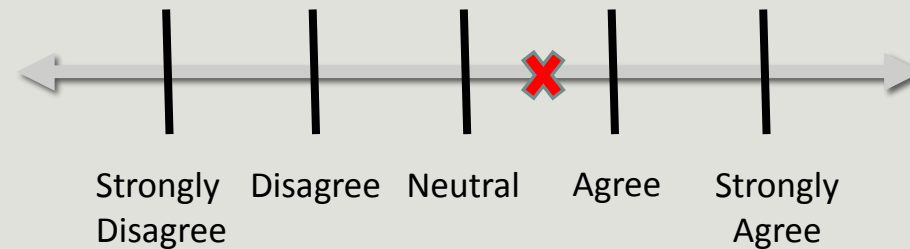
UNPAID Internships



■ Agree ■ Disagree/Neutral

Perceptions of College Professors on Requiring Internships

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	n	Mean
Should students be required to complete an internship before they graduate?	2	2	4	9	4	21	3.52



Correlations Between Selected Demographic Variables

		Perception of Benefits	Should Be Required	Years Teaching Experience	Personal Internship Experience?
Should Be Required	Pearson Correlation	.786**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	21			
Years Experience	Pearson Correlation	-.298	-.259		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.190	.256		
	N	21	21		
Personal Internship Experience?	Pearson Correlation	.187	.099	-.073	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.416	.670	.752	
	N	21	21	21	
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.163	.242	-.461*	-.043
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.494	.304	.041	.858
	N	20	20	20	20

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Additional Feedback from Faculty

We asked for additional concerns in an open ended format, and received responses in the following four themes:

- Grading and Curriculum
- Program Administration
- Prior (student) Commitments
- Skepticism

Grading/Curriculum?

We need to figure out a way to grade internships A through F instead of just S/U.

Necessity for a standardized rubric for internship expectations, monitoring educational advancement, working with employers, and evaluating student performance.

Students [may not] see this as a way to improve their soft skills or expand on knowledge learned in the classroom but as a separate thing they “have to do”

Program Administration

Identifying the right kind of internships for each student's needs and interests.

Finding someone to oversee the program.

In spite of interests, some occupations may not be able to utilize/support interns.

Students having easy access to information about internships. Faculty making students aware of potential internships. A way of identifying internships that would be an appropriate fit for the student.

Prior Commitments

90% of my AGI students are already working in the industry. Do you want them to quit their jobs to get another one?

[Some] students need to work in the family business to earn tuition. Their families can't afford for them to leave. Requiring internships will place hardships on our Ag students

Might be hard for students to find time to dedicate to an internship in the short 2-year time period

Skepticism

[We] had an internship requirement in the 80s and it was dropped because most students were sent to the [university] farms for their experience and it turned into just spending X number of hours at the farms and having the farm managers sign off.

Would the Ag Institute really withhold a diploma if a student completes all other coursework and not a 3-hour internship?

Implications of Findings

- Findings suggest there are strong barriers in the way of more favorable perceptions
- They're about neutral on requiring it, however, in general we have their support moving forward and we know their concerns



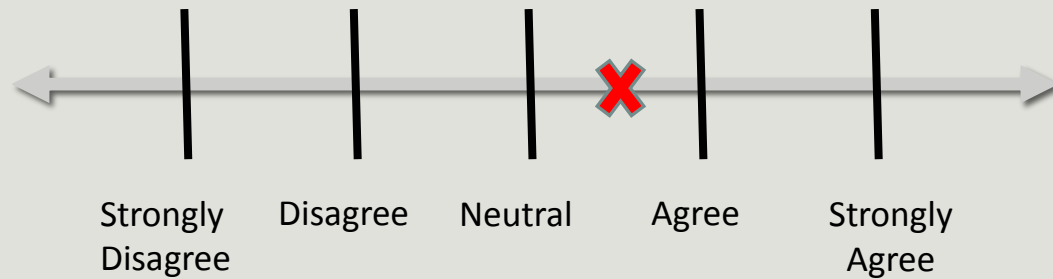
Advice for Others/Future Plans

- Surveying faculty to establish the barriers and challenges of developing an internship program is great way to start
- Get the perspective of the students
- Determine level of interest in different departments
- Pilot program- Horticulture department summer 2017.
 - Internships need to be paid
 - Work with students that already have jobs on farms



Back to our question

- Should we make internships a requirement?



Questions

References

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