

# Engaging Students in Life-Changing Learning

Royal Roads University's Learning and Teaching Model in  
Practice - Revised Edition

Edited by Stephen L. Grundy, Doug Hamilton, George  
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#### **Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

**Engaging students in life-changing learning : Royal Roads University's learning and teaching model in practice / edited by Stephen L. Grundy, Doug Hamilton, George Veletsianos, Niels Agger-Gupta, Pedro Márquez, Vivian Forssman & Myriam Legault. — Revised edition.**

**Issued in print and electronic formats.**

**ISBN 978-1-77510-991-4 (softcover).—ISBN 978-1-77510-990-7 (PDF).—**

**ISBN 978-1-77510-992-1 (EPUB).—ISBN 978-1-77510-994-5 (HTML).—**

**ISBN 978-1-77510-993-8 (Kindle)**

**1. Teaching. 2. Learning. 3. Education, Higher. 4. Royal Roads University.**

**I. Grundy, Stephen L., editor II. Royal Roads University, issuing body**

**LB1025.3.E52 2017**

**371.102**

**C2017-907520-9**

**C2017-907521-7**

# Improving Work Integrated Learning through Implementing Internship Performance Indicators

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## **Abstract**

In applied programs, there is a growing expectation for students to be work-ready at the end of their undergraduate and graduate studies. Work integrated learning is a strategy that enmeshes applied and practical experience with academic courses to offer integrated learning and a connection between post-secondary education and the workplace. Students in tourism and hospitality programs across British Columbia were surveyed along with their internship employers to better understand their perceptions of internship programs across the province. With 46 of 93 students and 14 of 55 employers responding, the research discovered that participants are generally satisfied, with the internship programs rated at 85% above average or excellent. The ability to use skills and knowledge from the classroom in the work environment is a particularly strong aspect of internship, bridging theory, applied learning, and practice. Some areas for improvement, though, include better communication between employers, students, and

supervisors, as well as broader internship opportunities. The findings also supported previous research regarding the potential disconnects between student expectations of internships and student internship performance evaluations completed by employers. The research demonstrated that internship programs continue to be an important aspect of the undergraduate and graduate learning experience and should be supported.

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## Introduction

Work Integrated Learning (WIL), also referred to broadly as active learning or experiential learning, is a widely used term, where students spend time in a workplace setting that is integrated into the curriculum of a course or program. This provides a bridge between theoretical learning in the classroom and applied learning in the workplace. Examples of WIL include apprenticeships, field placements, practicums, co-ops, internships, applied research projects, and service learning (Sattler and Peters, 2012).

There is a growing expectation for students to be work-ready at the end of their undergraduate and graduate programs (Business Council of BC, 2010). In a knowledge-based global economy, post-secondary education must respond to changes in the labour market and a common concern shared by employers is that graduates are not prepared for the rigours of the work place (Business Council of BC, 2010). Employers consistently advocate for programs that equip students with skills, knowledge and attributes that enable them to successfully and consistently perform in the workplace and continue to develop through further applied learning (OCED, 2012, p.12).

As educators respond to labour market needs, including the expectations of employers, student needs and expectations must also be considered. For students with a student loan, the average debt incurred in British Columbia for a four-year degree is \$27,600 (The Research Universities Council of BC, 2014). With or without a student loan, students are seeking programs that will help them transition successfully and seamlessly from school into careers, mitigating the concern of unemployment, underemployment, and further debt.

BC's hospitality programs are applied, and this focus has nurtured a tradition of WIL in all the hospitality diploma and degree programs offered in the province through apprenticeships, practicums, co-op work terms, and internships (Province of British Columbia, 2007). As WIL garners attention and further investment in BC's colleges and universities, there is an opportunity to broaden our understanding of WIL by investigating student and employer expectations and perceptions of WIL. Specifically, the researchers wanted to identify if there were performance indicators (skills, knowledge, attributes) that could be attributed to positive outcomes for students and also positive outcomes for employers. There is also an interest in identifying any differences in perception between employers and students on the performance indicators, and if gaps were present, to understand why. It is anticipated that this data will enable WIL faculty and staff to improve student outcomes and employer satisfaction by providing targeted adjustments to curriculum, teaching, on-site support, and communication with host employers and students.

## Background to the Research

In 2014, RRU had seven graduate programs and five undergraduate programs with a WIL component, where students spent 3-5 months in a workplace setting as part of their program in either a practicum or an internship. One such program, and the focus of this research, is the BA in International Hotel Management (BAIHM) in the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management (STHM), which has included WIL and an internship component in the degree since its inception in 2006.

The BAIHM is an applied degree that prepares students for a career in the international hospitality sector and includes a twelve-week, six-credit internship course at the end of the program. Internships in the BAIHM program facilitate the application of learning and are an opportunity to integrate and practice the knowledge and skills developed during the program, encouraging reflective practice and facilitating the transition from university to professional career.

The following learning outcomes are identified for the Internship placement and course.

An internship is considered successful when it (Royal Roads University, 2014):

- enables you to practice new skills and apply new knowledge within a professional employment setting,
- prepares you for employment,
- increases your employability following graduation with your present internship host or in another organization,
- widens your range of industry contacts and professional networks;
- generally broadens your global understanding and the opportunities available to you in your area of interest within the hospitality sector,
- provides applied experiences that can be reflected upon critically to advance your professional attitude and competence, and
- provides value to the internship host.

While Royal Roads University has a mandate to deliver applied, real world programs that respond to the needs of the evolving work place, broad performance indicators were not established to explore and analyse the effectiveness of WIL in the BAIHM. A mid-internship student and employer evaluation were in place; however, the surveys were brief and were designed to ensure the student was on-track and that any concerns from the student and the employer could be uncovered early and addressed as necessary. Similarly, a final internship student and employer evaluation ensured that the student received a final evaluation from their employer, and was also an opportunity to self-rate their performance relative to the learning outcomes for the internship course. This process was effective as a mechanism to

support communication between the student, the employer, and the faculty advisor for the course. It encouraged student reflection and addressed the specific learning outcomes established for the course. However, these evaluations had a specific purpose: they were not designed to provide a data set that could be used for broader planning or analysis.

Internship outcomes established for the internship course have not been formally assessed against performance indicators to ensure that learning outcomes for the course are achieved. This was a significant opportunity to further the understanding of how students perform in the work place and how they integrate their learning during the BAIHM program into an applied setting.

It was anticipated that performance indicators would offer insights and guidance to:

- identify what employers expect from students on internships,
- identify what students expect and value from their host employers,
- promote the benefits of hiring an intern as a host employer,
- promote the benefits of internships to prospective students,
- guide student career preparation and program curriculum through appropriate support services and teaching content, and
- provide a benchmark for additional research and monitoring of the effectiveness of internships.

This research was also timely for British Columbia's tourism learning system, a consortium of BC tourism and hospitality educators with a mandate to build a professional tourism and hospitality workforce in BC (LinkBC, 2013). In May 2013, at an annual BC Hospitality Management Articulation Committee Meeting, the members discussed experiential education in BC's hospitality education programs. There are seven hospitality management programs offered in post-secondary colleges and universities in British Columbia that incorporate WIL. One component of WIL—the internship—is also provided under the following names: co-operative education, work-placement, work experience, and practicum. Additionally, the courses vary in curriculum design, duration, learning objectives, and remuneration for the student. At this meeting, members identified that hospitality educators were not evaluating WIL effectively and it was agreed that there was a shared interest to work within the hospitality education community to establish performance indicators for WIL in hospitality programs (Diploma and Degree) in BC. While the term “internship” is used in this paper, participating WIL programs in this research include practicums, co-ops, and internships.

At the time, the authors agreed to take the lead to develop and implement performance indicators for hospitality internships with participating higher-education institutions across British Columbia. LinkBC, a provincial

coordinating agency for the tourism and hospitality sector in BC, would provide coordination support for the project. By extending the project province-wide, the reliability and validity of this data would be enhanced. Additionally, aggregation of the data would allow for macro level analyses of BC's hospitality education internships for the benefit of the students, schools, and hospitality industry.

## Literature Review

Many authors have discussed the variety of skills and experiences that post-secondary education programs should be providing. Dressler, Cedercreutz and Pacheco (2011) noted four categories of essential outcomes for education programs: integrative learning; knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world; intellectual and practical skills; and personal and social responsibility. They suggest that these elements should provide the foundation for programs in addition to teaching the specific disciplines. Also more focused on the softer skills, Roberts (1998) stressed the importance of understanding cultural norms, with particular focus on nonverbal communication, time orientation, interpersonal space, gender roles, and physical appearance. Dopson and Tas (2004) suggested that education should teach how to integrate knowledge, skills and values into the workplace. Many of these critical competencies and the integration of academic skills and knowledge can be accomplished through WIL.

Education institutions are increasingly recognizing the value of internships for their students and their programs. Internships can be an important step for those entering the workforce from a post-secondary institution, helping students to transition from the academic to professional world by putting theory into practice (Collin & Tynjala, 2003; NACE, 2014; Tse, 2010; Young & Baker, 2004). As Chi and Gursoy (2009) highlighted, more competition and complexity in tourism and hospitality is raising the bar on requirements for entry and growth in the industry. Students are now expected to add value from the day they start work and they cannot necessarily rely on the industry to assist them to enter the workplace and make a start with their career. Internships are one method of assisting students to get opportunities that they may not access without career development support and internship placement coaching available through their school programs.

Further complicating the students' move into a professional career, the constantly changing needs of tourism and hospitality make it difficult for educational programs to provide for and adapt to all of the industry requirements (Dopson & Tas, 2004). However, with properly designed internships, students are able to apply information gained from school to real-life situations and are better able to understand and learn from their future workplace (Young & Baker, 2004; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008). Students also gain confidence, leadership skills, and maturity while developing their networks and future connections through these opportunities (Knouse &

Fontenot, 2008; NACE, 2014). To provide additional assistance to their professions, Chi and Gursoy (2009) commented that hospitality programs are starting to develop more of their own placement services and courses to assist students during and after their coursework. Programs are assisting in developing job search abilities, networking skills, and providing internship experiences to aid the future success of students.

Internship programs are not only important for the success of students, but they can also be critical to the success of hospitality programs. Research conducted by Chi and Gursoy (2009) with industry recruiters revealed the top five factors when they are considering students from different hospitality programs: 1) how prepared students were for the real world, 2) how much industry experience faculty had, 3) how prepared students were for interviews, 4) the reputation of the program, and 5) the quality of the curriculum. Internships were deemed to be very important by industry for several reasons, such as giving students an opportunity to practice classroom material, providing students with more understanding of the industry and their needs, showing students a variety of career options, and supplying valuable hands-on experience. These findings were supported by work from Knouse and Fontenot (2008), also noting the value of providing realistic expectations in the students. These internship programs provide benefits to the industry as well by giving them access to new employees, screening these new employees without committing to them, assisting in the education of future staff, and strengthening ties with hospitality and tourism programs (Chi & Gursoy 2009).

According to Dressler, Cedercreutz, and Pacheco (2011), ensuring the relevancy and success of these higher education programs has been a concern for at least the last three decades. Institutions are being tasked more and more to ensure that students can thrive in their future careers; focus is shifting from assessing teaching to assessing learning. Experiential learning advocates have responded to this growing desire to evaluate outcomes by developing more tools and applying more focus on student learning. This concern to measure and improve outcomes extends to internships where, as Tse (2010) noted, much research has highlighted the disconnect between the expectations and evaluations of internships by students.

However, the desire to evaluate internships is not a new phenomenon, as evidenced by work from researchers such as Downey and DeVeau (1988) and Walo (2001). Downey and DeVeau (1988) looked at internships from the point of view of potential employers and discovered: that more hours in the field were desired, internship programs need to be properly coordinated and supervised, more documentation is necessary to monitor internships and provide feedback, realistic expectations need to be set, and hands-on field experience is critical for future success. From the perspective of many of these recruiters, the internship programs were not providing all of the skills and experiences that they sought, such as realistic expectations and sufficient

hands-on experience. In 2006, Knouse and Fonenot found somewhat similar results, emphasizing such things as the need for more employer participation, clearer expectations, and mentoring built into the internships. They concluded however, that internships were a beneficial activity overall since students and the industry gained through the experiences.

Tse (2010) approached the issue of evaluating internships from the student perspective in order to discover some key themes of importance for the interns. Using content analysis of reports from students, nine key areas of focus were revealed, which he suggested should be used for examining internships. These include: relationships with colleagues, personal growth, acquisition of skills, learning opportunities from colleagues, contributions by the student, relevance of the internship, supervision, problem solving, and difficulties encountered. Tse noted that the most important element for interns seemed to be the working relationship with colleagues as a measure of satisfaction and success. A somewhat similar study by Rothman (2010) analysed open-ended feedback from interns regarding their internships. Rothman noted that the key aspects of a successful internship include: proper supervision, adequate feedback, challenging assignments with clear expectations, exposure to the entire organization, and explicit goals for the internship.

The need to constantly monitor and adapt programs has led some tourism and hospitality programs to implement monitoring systems for their internships, such as those noted below. Young and Baker (2013) discussed the academic rigor required to demonstrate and justify the attention and resources directed towards internships, noting the need for evaluation from students and supervisors or employers. The Rosen College of Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida is one particular program that continuously gauges the effectiveness of their internships by surveying both employers and students (Dressler, Cedercreutz and Pacheco 2011). Their assessments focus on the areas of basic communication, problem solving, learning, personal characteristics, working with others, leadership, technology use, work culture, managerial skills, and professionalism. By gathering data from these two sources, the college is better able to understand the experiential learning aspects of their programs. Chi and Gursoy (2009) also note the value of gathering feedback from students and employers as their perspectives and expectations may be very different. The contrasting results from Tse (2010) and Downey and DeVea (1988) further supported the potential differences in views regarding internships between interns and their employers, and the need to gather evaluations from both sources.

This literature highlights the importance of including the views of interns and their employers in any assessment of internship programs. Additionally, a number of key areas for examination are provided by the various studies. The working relationships with co-workers seems to be a critical area to

include as well as the supervision provided to the intern. Basic skills and knowledge are also important themes to research since the students will need to demonstrate competency in their chosen discipline. Finally, occasions to contribute to the workplace seem to be important for interns, based upon previous research. Assessing the effectiveness of internships in providing all of these experiences and opportunities will allow for a better understanding of internships and the role they play in a student's total education program.

## **Research Method**

Colleges and universities across British Columbia with hospitality programs agreed to participate in this research. Their assistance was considered important to provide a greater breadth of information and increase the pool of participants in the research. Survey instruments were developed specifically for students and their employers to gain both perspectives of the various internship programs across the province. While each of these surveys was targeted at the different groups, questions were designed to allow for comparing and contrasting views of the programs. These surveys were pre-tested in the fall of 2014 and, after some modifications, invitations to participate were sent out electronically to 93 students and 55 employers across four programs from four postsecondary institutions. Responses were collected and cleaned, leaving 46 student and 14 employer surveys, resulting in response rates of 49% and 25% respectively. Due to the number of responses, the analyses concentrated on the two complete datasets without any additional crosstabs or separation into smaller group

Both surveys were composed of six main sections. Section One helped to identify the type of position or role that the student played at the organization as well as the type of organization. This information is important to investigate differences in expectations or results across different positions and businesses. Section Two examined the working relationships that the student had with other co-workers, recognizing the importance these relationships can make for successful internships and future careers. Section Three examined the skills and knowledge that the student has developed and demonstrated, with a focus on softer skills such as communication, time management, and responsibility. Section Four asks about contributions to the organization by the student. Section Five looks at the amount of supervision that the student received during the internship—considered important for the development of the student. Finally, Section Six provided an opportunity to rate the entire internship experience. The survey also allowed for additional comments at the end, so that the employer and student could advance any information not already covered.

The electronic surveys eased the collection and consolidation of the data from the various sources around the province of British Columbia. Data was imported into Excel for cleaning and analysis. Any open-ended comments

were coded and grouped into categories based upon the various sections of the survey and then an “Other” category.

## **Research Results**

To keep things organized, the results are presented in the order that they were asked in the surveys, as outlined above.

### **Section One – Internship Position**

Students reported that they were interning in a range of hospitality positions, but mainly related to Front Office (37%), Food and Beverage (26%), and Housekeeping (15%), for a total of 78%. These are typical positions that students from a bachelor in hospitality management program would expect, so this was an expected result for this section of the survey. The response rates of 49% and 25% were considered sufficient, but 46 student responses and 14 employer responses did not allow for finer analyses.

### **Section Two – Working Relationships with Co-Workers**

In Section Two, students responded that they were generally pleased with their work environment and co-workers. Working relationships with co-workers, cooperativeness with co-workers, and ability to positively affect the work environment for others were rated at above average or excellent by 87%, 85%, and 87% respectively. Employers generally agreed with those assessments, providing ratings of 86% for all three of these factors. The main difference between the student and employer feedback was in the strength of the positive ratings, as employers tended towards above average while students were more likely to consider working relationships with co-workers to be excellent.

### **Section Three – Skills and Knowledge**

While student and employer assessments of the internships were somewhat similar for the work environment and relationships, they had different perceptions of the skills and knowledge of the students—the focus of Section Three. Student ratings of their skills and knowledge being above average or excellent ranged from 74% for problem-solving skills to 96% for demonstrating a strong work ethic. In contrast, employer ratings of skills and knowledge spanned from 64% with responsibility and communication skills to 86% with problem solving skills. It is interesting to note that problem-solving skills was the only factor in which the employers rated the students higher than the students rated themselves. Differentials between the ratings ranged from 27% for responsibility to only 6% for time management skills. The Table 1 displays the ratings from students and employers, and their differences.

Factor	Student	Employer	Difference
Responsibility (e.g. ownership of tasks)	91%	64%	27%
Communication skills	85%	64%	21%
Application of knowledge and skills	91%	71%	20%
Guest service skills	87%	71%	16%
Problem-solving skills	74%	86%	12%
Ability to work with other cultures	87%	79%	8%
Time management skills	85%	79%	6%

*Table 1.* Ratings of Skills and Knowledge

#### Section Four – Opportunity to Contribute

The responses provided for each of the four questions in this section were also rated higher by students than by employers (Table 2). When combining the ratings for excellent and above average, the differentials between student ratings and employer ratings were even greater than in the previous section, ranging between 47% and 14% for each of the four questions. The rating differential was wider for “asks questions and shares suggestions and ideas” (47% higher student rating) and “strong work ethic” (25% higher student rating). “Asks questions and shares suggestions” received a rating of 36% by employers at excellent or above average, compared to a student rating of 83%. Employers and students had stronger agreement for “positive influence on colleagues and team members” (16% higher student rating) and “takes initiative” (14% higher student rating). In Section Four we can conclude that there is a wider gap between how employers and students evaluate asking questions and sharing suggestions and ideas in the workplace, and work ethic and productivity, than the other opportunities to contribute that were assessed.

Factor	Student	Employer	Difference
Asks questions and shares suggestions and ideas	83%	36%	47%
Demonstrates a strong work ethic; consistently productive	96%	71%	25%
Positively influence colleagues and team members	87%	71%	16%
Demonstrates initiative	85%	71%	14%

*Table 2.* Ratings of Opportunity to Contribute

#### Section Five – Supervision

Students were very positive regarding on-site supervision, with most rating it as above average (33%) or excellent (41%). The employers were more critical about their supervision, with 38% rating it above average and only 14% as excellent. This may indicate that students and employers have different perceptions regarding the need for supervision or of who is responsible for supervision. Students may receive and accept supervision from their

senior peers and be amenable to receiving direction and guidance from other employees, while employers may perceive supervision to only be provided by a supervisor.

### Section Six – Overall Performance and Value

The employers rated the overall performance of students as excellent (14%), above average (36%) and average (50%). Similar to other assessments, students self-rated much higher than employers for overall performance. Students believed that they were either excellent (30%), above average (61%) or average (9%). This tendency may relate to the students' fewer years of experience (54% had less than three years experience) and their level of self-awareness. The employer survey included one additional question to further evaluate the capability of the students—to the question “Would I recommend this student to another employer?” 12 employers (86%) responded “yes” and 2 employers (14%) responded “no.”

The student survey included five questions in this section that were not on the employer survey. The first question asked the students to rate the overall value of the work experience placement. One student rated the placement as poor (2%), six rated it as average (13%), thirteen rated the placement as above average (28%) and twenty-six (57%) rated the placement as excellent.

The qualitative data in the survey broadens our understanding of the different ways a work placement can provide value to students. Students were asked to provide further comment and reflection on the overall value of their work placement; 20 students responded (43%). The responses were assigned a positive, negative or neutral rating (18 positive, 1 negative and 1 neutral). The majority of the comments referred to the knowledge and skills the student had applied and developed while on the work placement (40%).

*My work experience was great and rich. Doing that job gave me the opportunity to use the knowledge I acquired in class last year, get and improve some useful skills, learn things we don't learn in class that has to do with running a restaurant.*

Some responses related to learning about working relationships (20%), e.g., “Being able to work collaboratively with others whose cultures are very different from mine.” Four students made reference to aspiring to more developmental opportunities that were not offered or arranged, e.g., “This was a great company for students on internship... I wish they could provide more cross-training opportunities so I could learn more knowledge from different departments.”

The second question asked students if they would recommend their work placement to others; 38 (83%) responded “yes” and 8 (17%) responded “no.” These scores are similar to the employer ratings for the students (86% and 14% respectively). The third question asked students if they were going back to school; 26 (57%) responded “yes” and 20 (44%) responded “no.”

The fourth question asked students to identify anything that the student's

supervisor or school advisor could have done to improve the work placement experience. There were 35 (76%) responses, 19 (54%) of which indicated “no or nothing or satisfaction,” 8 (23%) of which related to suggestions for the students’ work placement supervisor, and 8 (23%) of which related to suggestions for the students’ school supervisor. The responses were wide-ranging and included gaining insight into workplace politics, on-site housing, more projects, difficulty completing a final paper while working, lack of opportunity to apply skills and knowledge, check in with a Skype call, dissatisfaction with front-line job, provide pros and cons of the job in advance, and visa-related issues.

The fifth question asked students to comment on how their work placement has influenced their career goals; 39 responses were assigned a positive, negative, or neutral rating (32 positive and 7 neutral).

Question six asked students to comment on their most significant learning from the work experience (Table 3). The researchers assigned the comments to the criteria established for Section 2-5 of the student survey and the responses related most to Section Three and the development of skills and knowledge.

<b>Section 2 (working relationships with co-workers)</b>	<b>5</b>
Section 3 (skills and knowledge)	22
Section 4 (opportunity to contribute)	7
Section 5 (overall value to you)	5

Table 3. Most Significant Learning.

## Discussion

Tse (2010) looked at the importance of evaluating internships from the student frame of reference, and the research suggests interns are generally satisfied with the current internship program, with 85% rating the experience as above average or excellent. Qualitative comments supported this assessment, noting that it was a “good working experience” and a “valuable experience for the future career”. Students did comment, however, that there were some areas for improvement in their internship programs. Better communications during the internships between the school advisor and/or supervisor as well as better opportunities being offered were two areas mentioned. This last point was also highlighted with respect to potential areas of disconnect between expectations and reality, discussed below.

Chi and Gursoy (2009) and Knouse and Fontenot (2008) discussed the value of internships in providing students with realistic expectations and better preparing students for the realities of the industry. Students in the study seemed to agree, when asked about the influence of the internship on their future careers. Of the 39 responses, 32 spoke positively about the impact while the remaining 7 were neutral. Comments included “offered me great

training and insight about the industry and what I want to do” and “my internship opened my eyes into the hotel world” (see an interview with Kaitlin Duplak).

The research also corroborated Tse’s (2010) finding that potential disconnects can occur between expectations and evaluations of internships. The research showed that most of the students had reasonable expectations, but that some work could be done with helping students make the most of their internships. One student commented that the internship was nothing different than a regular position. Another student however, asked the employer for additional opportunities and tasks, and was able to use the internship to learn many of the positions at the organization. This type of initiative should be communicated to students prior to their internship.

Another potential area for separation between interns and their employers is with self-assessments or ratings. Most of the interns rated their abilities higher than those from the employer. While this may be a common occurrence with evaluations, it could lead to dissatisfaction with potential employers if students do not perceive any key weaknesses or areas for improvement. Chi and Cursoy (2009) indicate the importance of maintaining industry support for the internships and programs in general. This emphasizes the need to continue to monitor the effectiveness of the internships and watch for any areas needing development from the industry perspective.

It is worth noting that problem solving skills was the only factor where the employers rated the students higher than the students rated themselves. This may indicate that hospitality educators’ emphasis on real world problem solving in applied courses, case-based teaching, and curricula with an emphasis on operations management may be supporting WIL students to distinguish themselves for problem solving in the workplace relative to their peers.

Some of the widest differentials in ratings between employers and students were in relation to “asks questions and shares suggestions and ideas” (47% higher student rating), responsibility (27% difference) and strong work ethic (24% difference). In the hospitality industry, employees work different shifts with different people on a regular basis. The 24/7 operational environment often does not enable managers to have regular or consistent time with their direct reports. Furthermore, new employees are often assigned the less favourable shifts, and these shifts typically have fewer managers and supervisors (night shifts, early morning shifts). One possible explanation for the difference in ratings is that students do share their ideas and ask questions, and demonstrate their responsibility and work ethic; however, they do so with a supervisor or the most senior employees on their shift and not in the presence of their assigned supervisor for the internship course. Alternatively, there may indeed be a difference in perception between employers and students regarding these two criteria; this difference could

be attributed to well-documented generational differences or to a lack of experience and maturity in the workplace that some employers observe in the behaviour of students during internships.

The ability to utilize skills and knowledge from the class in a work environment was a particularly strong aspect of the internship. While student ratings were notably higher than their employers for skills and knowledge, evaluations at above average and excellent were all at 64% or higher, with many in the high eighties or nineties. Many of the students also commented that their most significant learning from the experience was in the area of skills and knowledge. They noted opportunities to practice skills with people management, team building, and communication, amongst others. This strongly supports the research from Young and Baker (2004) and Knouse and Fontenot (2008) regarding the benefit of applying classroom information in real situations (see the value of practical solutions).

An important final indicator of the value of the internships for the future of the students comes through in the employer evaluations of the students. With over 85% of the employers willing to recommend the students to other employers, these students have been provided a positive step forward towards their professional lives in hospitality. Several researchers (Colin and Tynjala 2003, NACE 2014, Tse 2010, Young and Baker 2004) highlight this value, noting how internships help students to transition into their future careers. Clearly, the internships are an important element of the education program.

## **Conclusion**

The BAIHM program at Royal Roads University aims to provide students with global awareness, hospitality skills and knowledge, the ability to critically think and problem solve, an understanding of how to work with others, and effective communication competence. One of the key elements in their education is an internship, which strives to offer students with the opportunity to practice these outcomes in a practical setting while helping them advance their futures. This research looked at the effectiveness of the internship program from the perspectives of employers and students from various colleges and universities in British Columbia.

The research initially set out to offer insights and guidance for the internship program in several areas, including identifying expectations, promoting the benefits, guiding preparation, and providing a benchmark for future research. All of these goals were achieved. Results from students and employers show that both groups benefit from the internships, with students getting that foothold into their future careers and employers receiving a skilled and knowledgeable employee. For the future, it will be important to continue monitoring the internship programs, minimizing the potential disconnect between the students and employers, and maximizing the benefits and opportunities for the students. As this research demonstrates,

students are being well served by the current internship program and it is essential for their future, and the future of the BAIHM program, that this continues.

### Research Limitations

Unfortunately, the research was not able to gather sufficient quantities of responses for each of the types of positions to allow for further segmenting of the analyses. The researchers were initially interested in comparing perceptions for different groups (e.g. Front Office, Food & Beverage, and Housekeeping). It is possible that perceptions about the internships vary depending upon the role played within the industry. Future research would hope to expand the number of employers and students who participate in the research to allow for greater refinement of our understanding of WIL.

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