The Double Value of International Internships

Moya Clemente, 1,a, Ribes Giner, G.,b, and Sanahuja Vélez, G.,c
1Universitat Politècnica de València, imoya@esp.upv.es, 2Universitat Politècnica de València, gabrigi@omp.upv.es, 3Universitat Politècnica de València, gsanahuj@upvnet.upv.es.

Abstract

Literature on business internships identifies beneficial effects on its main three stakeholders: students, employers, and higher education institutions. Furthermore, some authors have identified additional effects when studying international internships, specially referred to improved intercultural skills and learning outcomes. Increment of international internships is a trend in most European universities. The Universitat Politècnica de València has had a noteworthy increase of international internships is the last years, especially through the European founded former programme Leonardo da Vinci and Erasmus Placement. As intercultural skills are being more demanded by employers in a globalized world, it is expected that this increase in the internships abroad will have a positive effect on the employability of the graduates of the Universitat Politècnica de València

Keywords: Internships, Exchange Programs, Intercultural Competences, Employability.

Introduction

Scientific literature on business internships have identified beneficial effects on its main three stakeholders: students, employers, and higher education institutions (Thiel & Hartley, 1997; Coco, 2000; Gault, Redington & Schlager, 2000; Divine et al., 2007).

The evidence supports the efficacy of internships done by university students in enhanced employability (Taylor, 1988; Knouse, Tanner & Harris, 1999; Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000; Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Cook, Parker, & Pettijohn, 2004; Mihail, 2006; Divine et al., 2007; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Gault, Leach, & Duvey, 2010; Weible & McClure, 2011). Also, improved competences is highlighted as another main favorable effect on students (Beard & Morton, 1999; Chen et al., 2011; Cook, Parker, & Pettijohn, 2004; Divine et al., 2007; Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000; Green, Graybeal, & Madison, 2011; Gryski, Johnson & O’Toole, 1987; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Knouse, Tanner & Harris, 1999; Mihail, 2006; Taylor, 1988; Scholz, 2003; Scholz, 2003; Theil & Hartley, 1997).

The internationalization trend has converted this into an interdependent and interconnected world, in which real or virtual relations are the everyday norm for people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Chen, 2010). Intercultural communication competence, or the capability to cooperate properly and effectively with people of different cultural backgrounds, is consequently a requirement at present times (Zhang, 2012) and will be progressively more demanded by employers and needed by individual citizens, as globalization expands. Intercultural competence is the group of knowledge and skills that enables to successfully interact and work with people from other ethnic, religious, cultural, national, and geographic groups. It is the essential acceptance of people who are different to oneself outside one’s own culture, the capacity to cooperate with them in a truly constructive way which is free of negative attitude (Schmid, 2009).
Effects on students of International Internships

In addition to the beneficial effects which have been identified in the case of national internships, international internships have an additional effect which is improving intercultural competences of its participants as some authors have highlighted in their researches (van’t Klooster et al., 2008; Zhang, 2012; Zopiatis, 2007).

Intercultural competence, according to Zhang, 2012, includes three basic aspects: intercultural communicative skills, intercultural working experience, intercultural understanding; the three of them appear to be improved through the experience of an overseas internship.

A recent study concluded that international internships produce superior learning outcomes than study exchanges and national internships in terms of foreign language skills, self-efficacy and intercultural competencies (Stronkhorst, 2005).

International Internships at the Universitat Politècnica de València

In the last years a number of international internship programs have been launched and consolidated, and there has been a considerable increase in the number of participating students, employers, and universities. The most popular included the European Union founded Erasmus-Placement (currently within Erasmus+), the former program Leonardo da Vinci for recent graduates, and IASTE and AIESEC which are organized by student associations.

On the one hand, the Universitat Politècnica de València has been actively participating into these programs and an increasing number of students has been able to travel abroad to do an internship. On the other hand, there is also a “free mover” program which enables international internships which were not covered by the existing programs.

Moreover, the law which regulates the business internships in Spain nowadays allows the internship to take place in a foreign country. Despite the initial difficulties of implementing these types of programs abroad, the Universitat Politècnica de València is currently studying and adapting its internal procedures in order to offer the possibility in the near future to undertake a business internship abroad.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Erasmus-Placement</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2012</td>
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<td>235</td>
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Source: own elaboration
Conclusions

Higher education institutions and governments would be wise to promote international internship programs as a way of multiplying the beneficial effects internships have on students in various spheres, especially on employability, through the intercultural competences that can be acquired, including the improvement of foreign languages skills.

If higher education institutions are committed to employability of its university graduates, they should make international business internships available to the maximum possible number of students and manage effective and satisfactory internship programs.

Efforts should be made in publicizing among its community the recognized benefits of international business internships to the three parties involved in order to increase student participation, and the necessary resources to implement and manage successful international internship programs should be provided.

References


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