



College, P., Quain, B., Downey, J. and Marsh, T. (2021). The Impact of Hospitality Industry-Wide Shutdowns on One University's Internship Program: A Case Study. *International Journal of Gaming Hospitality and Tourism*. 1(1). https://stockton.edu/light/documents/ijght_vol.1-no.1/impact_industry-wide_shutdowns_10-14-21.pdf

The Impact of Hospitality Industry-Wide Shutdowns on One University's Internship Program: A Case Study

Polly A. College

Ph.D. Candidate of Computing and Informatics
[Drexel University](#)

Bill Quain, Ph.D.

Professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies
Stockton University

James Downey, Ph.D.

Adjunct Professor of Hospitality Management
Lynn University

Tara Marsh

HTMS Internship Coordinator
Stockton University

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a critical disruption of Hospitality Education – especially for Internship courses. Substantial industry shut-downs and health-related restrictions made it difficult for students to find positions in Summer 2020. In one university in the United States, the faculty made critical decisions about its Internship Program, using both past experiences and newly-available qualitative data. The result was a Virtual Internship course that still delivered the desired outcomes. Using techniques such as checklist analysis and key word research, researchers identified key elements of the Internship experience, and replicated it utilizing various pedagogical tools. While the intention of the faculty members was to simply overcome the temporary difficulties presented by the pandemic, the data from the Learning Interaction Reports revealed a significant, long-term problem: students were receiving inconsistent experiences in their Internships. By combining ongoing curriculum reviews with new analyses, the faculty created a Virtual Internship class for summer 2020. However, some tools that helped bridge the gap in differing student experiences will remain in place. It is important to note that the researchers do not intend their findings and decisions to be a universal solution for Internship course revisions. Rather, the actions taken were simply a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, by one university, for one course.

Keywords

Internships, Experiential Learning, Learning Interaction Reports, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

In Spring 2020, the Hospitality Faculty at Stockton University faced a serious challenge: how to continue to offer their Internship course, even though the industry was virtually shutdown in the Atlantic City market. Fortunately, the Hospitality faculty had instituted a serious program of continuous improvement, based on regular assessments, and a strong commitment to the Core Program Objectives. In addition,

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several faculty had just completed an internal research project that specifically identified key components of the Internship course. With this background, the faculty not only completely redesigned the 2020 Internship course, but also implemented some innovative activities that greatly improved the Internship experience, even after the industry re-opened. In this article, the authors will provide details on the assessment process the faculty followed, as well as explain how a timely internal research project provided the findings that drove the innovative changes the faculty made, and the unique research methodology that made it possible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Why Internships are Important - An Overview

Career guidance formally began in 1908 when Frank Parsons established the Vocation Bureau in Boston, Massachusetts. Parsons developed theoretical models for practical work experience for students. The components are to obtain a clear understanding of the individual's aptitudes, interests, and limitations. Then, understand the requirements and conditions of different kinds of employment. Finally, to match the first two together would result in successful guidance (Williamson, 1952). While John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget founded the experiential learning approach in 1938, David Kolb distilled the theory into a four-staged model of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). These pillars of practical experience have long served as the base model for creating meaningful experiences that combine both academic learning and on the job training and supervision. The experiential learning activity of internships has been established as a vital component of higher education programs (Zopiatis, et. al., 2021)

In 1988, James Downey and Linsley DeVeau analyzed Internship experiences. They found that most four-year Hospitality Programs require students to complete between 500 and 550 hours of Internship. The only documentation required of the students' experience was a written report. However, the 50 largest lodging and food-service corporations surveyed indicated that the students needed between 1,500 and 2,500 Internship hours, and more documentation should be required (Downey and DeVeau, 1988). Most recently, Stansbie, Nash and Chang (2016) linked Dewey's 1938 constructs with modern interpretations, and discussed their findings in the *Journal of Sports, Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality*. The authors, however, left a strong message in limitations and further research; the next step is to link academics and practical learning.

The Impact of COVID-19 on the Hospitality Industry

Hospitality and Tourism was the first industry impacted by the virus, when cruise ships carrying infected passengers were stranded in the ocean, awaiting a place to discharge their passengers (Taylor, Derrick, Bryson 2020). In the early stages of the pandemic, the Chinese Government shut down travel between cities in China; the United States President shut down air travel from both China and Europe; and Europe banned air travel from the United States (Taylor, Derrick, Bryson, 2020). In fact, international travel bans restricted over 90% of the global population from traveling Gössling et. al., 2020).

“Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the world's economy was shut down almost overnight.” (UNTWO, 2020). Bartik, et al. (2020) state that practices such as social distancing, stay-at-home orders, and travel and mobility restrictions are having a deleterious effect on the [hospitality] industry. Gursoy and Chi (2020) provided insight into the now well-accepted perceptions of guests as it relates to their fearfulness of travel, restaurant dining and hotel stays. The findings of Gursoy and Chi's survey are startling and clearly support the growing concern that the hospitality industry will not fully recover soon nor may ever be the same (Gursoy & Chi, 2020).

In the United States and Canada, there has been a plethora of reporting on how the industry, academic institutions, faculty and students have adapted to the changing Internship environment.

A number of newspaper and web-based stories, such as the report from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), detail how companies have simply shifted their Internships to a virtual state (SHRM, 2020). Although even when student interns are working on site, it is not in hospitality because so many hospitality businesses are simply shut down, or at least not at full capacity. This has produced a feeling that, even when businesses are still hiring interns, the focus is on other things. As one Canadian student put it, “Everyone is still very helpful, but I feel as though most communication is done frantically....I think HR [Human Resource] departments have bigger problems right now than hiring students, so sometimes it’s hard to get in contact to find out important details that I need regarding my Internship.” (Ganeshalingam, 2020).

Hospitality and tourism internships critically develop students’ workplace skills, which are essential to employment in this work domain (Bilsand, et. al, 2020). As such, successful hospitality education programs need internship experiences’ since the internship provides a professional learning experience that integrates theory learned in the classroom with practical work experience (Barrows, 1999; Bosselman, 1999). However, with so many hospitality businesses being shut down, face-to-face hospitality Internships were greatly reduced in number. Bayerlein and Jeske (2018) proposed mediated internships, or more specifically, e-internships or simulated internships. These types of internships are based at the college or university instead of with an actual employer. They provide the students with a structured learning experience that replicates a real-world setting (Bayerlein and Jeske, 2018). While the format provides these structured experiences, the authenticity of the simulated internship environment is limited by the software used (Bayerlein, 2015).

Hospitality and tourism management programs will need to continue to adapt to the changing environment, but the subject at hand is the impact COVID-19 had on Internship courses during the summer of 2020. The decisions university faculty had to make occurred in March of 2020, when even less was known about the impacts of the virus. At the time, many faculty members believed the impacts of the virus would be temporary and might even be completely mitigated by the summer of 2020.

In all known instances, university faculty reverted to their course and program objectives to guide them during these times of great uncertainty. This principle brought some measure of stability to the programs’ strategies and tactics. However, Stockton University utilized their course and program objectives in conjunction with data obtained from an Internal analysis completed on the unique diary-like student reflections captured within the school’s learning management system. These reflections are learning interaction reports (LIRs).

Stockton University’s Hospitality Program

The Hospitality faculty at Stockton University have a history of program-wide assessment and evaluation of their Internship program. When the Hospitality Program was founded in 2000, the faculty adopted a two-course sequence, with a Professional Work Experience course and a Co-op course. The Professional Work Experience course required students to work 400 hours in a Hospitality industry job and to write a reflection paper. The Co-op course required another 400 hours of work, along with classroom interactions. While the combined 800 hours of work was more than the average of 500 to 550 hours reported by Downey and DeVeau, it was still far from the 1,500 to 2,500 hours the industry indicated would be appropriate (Downey, 1988).

Although the classroom time accounted for the “observation and reflection” cornerstone espoused by Miettinen (2000) there was not a general, integrative method for learning new concepts, and then testing those concepts in real-life situations (Miettinen, 2000). In addition, the Co-op course had a very serious drawback; each section of the Co-op met on campus once per week *while* the students were taking the course. This meant that each student had to find a job close to the University or else miss the four-hour

class. Thus, students were unable to take advantage of career-building Internship opportunities with employers such as Disney.

Even worse (and possibly a predictor of shutdowns such as we experienced in COVID) the students were at the mercy of economic circumstances in the Atlantic City market. For example, when Atlantic City casinos laid off 8,000 employees during the financial crisis of 2008/09, many full-time employees were let go, flooding the labor market with highly qualified applicants for each available job that *did* open. For the second quarter of 2020, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that of the counties across the United States, Atlantic County, where Stockton University is located, had the largest year-over-year job loss at 34.2% of the workforce. Additionally, the largest employment decrease by job category was in the leisure and hospitality jobs, which lost 33,336 jobs. This equates to 75.2% of all the jobs in Atlantic County (Davis, 2020).

To overcome these difficulties, and to more faithfully execute the four cornerstones of experiential learning (Miettinen, 2000), the faculty proposed, developed and adopted the “Experiential Learning Sequence,” of four courses. These courses are featured in Table 1 below. The purpose of the four-course Experiential Learning Sequence was to overcome problems caused by dependence on hospitality business demand and to implement a full coverage of the four cornerstones of experiential learning.

Table 1 Experiential Learning Sequence

Course Name	Course Description
Professional Work Experience	400 hours of work, reflection & resume building
Career Development	Face to face classroom experience with both theory and practical exercises, highly connected to the University’s Career Development Center
Internship	Online course with no in-class meetings, 225 hours of upper-level work experience, management project with employer, Learning Interaction Reports, Job Tour Videos
Capstone	Case studies, reflections, technology; similar to business schools’ policies course

METHODOLOGY

Learning Interaction Reports (LIRs)

When the Internship course was first developed in 2016, the course instructor developed two unique tools that helped the faculty conduct a deep analysis of the entire Experiential Work Experience sequence. These two tools were the Learning Interaction Report (LIRs) and the Job Tour Video (JTVs). The LIRs are short journal entries, with specific requirements in terms of detail and subject matter. They are not random musings by the students, but rather a directed approach to analyzing the transactions and interactions that occur on an Internship job. An example LIR is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Example LIR

“We sent a guest to their room, but the guest came back to the Front Desk and told us the room had not been cleaned yet. I looked at the PMS screen and the housekeeper had clicked on the “room ready” button. I contacted the floor supervisor and gave her the name of the housekeeper who had mistakenly listed the room as “ready,” and the floor supervisor showed the housekeeper where she went wrong. Meanwhile, the guest was given another room, and I arranged for a room amenity to be sent up to the guest and alerted the General Manager so she could make a follow-up call to the guest, to apologize. I learned about these procedures in Hotel Administration and Operations class. When the General Manager called the guest, the guest said that he was appreciative for the solution, and that he realized that these things happen. The guest was satisfied with the results of our actions to solve the problem.”

LIRs are similar to Internship reports described by Zopiatis and Constanti (2012) in that the students are reporting on experiences within their Internship after the experiences have occurred. However, the LIRs are different in that they are short snippets of a situation the student encountered while on the job. The student is required to relate what they encountered back to something they did or did not learn while in the classroom. Additionally, the LIRs are contained within the learning management system of the school thereby making the LIR only available to the professor of record. While various methods such as sentiment analysis or an electronic word of mouth (EWOM) (Philander & Zhong, 2016) analysis used by Twitter and other social media platforms could have been used, neither were appropriate within this context. Sentiment data is categorized into positive, neutral and/or negative (Chiu, et al., 2015, Pang & Lee, 2008). This is not an appropriate analysis for student comment data as the information disclosed within the LIRs contains more data than just positive, neutral and/or negative comments. Twitter is one of the top three most-used social media platforms used by hotel and restaurant operators (Kim, Connolly, 2013) but is not an appropriate communication vessel in this instance due to the potential confidential information that a student would want to write about. Similarly situated are other public social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

The LIRs were analyzed and published for internal review in February 2020. Please note that because the submission of LIRs is part of the students’ coursework, Stockton’s Internal Review Board (IRB) did not approve the release of this data for public consumption.

The faculty investigators produced several critical analyses from the data, including:

- The courses the students found most useful when taking their Internships. This information proved to be extremely important when it came time to re-design the Internship course during COVID.
- The types of issues the students routinely reported in their LIR journal entries. Again, this information was critical when revising the Internship class to meet course goals during the COVID pandemic.

While we cannot disclose the actual list of issues that the research produced, one important finding is that the most frequently reported issues that students dealt with during their Internships were almost all *operational* in nature. Almost none were strategic. In addition, a quick analysis of the types of jobs the students performed were also *operational*. Almost none of them were strategic or even corporate. They were primarily front-line jobs dealing directly with either guests or with the preparation and execution of day-to-day items. This information created the foundation for the redesign necessitated by COVID.

Armed with the data from the LIRs, the University’s course description and established Internship goals enumerated in Table 2, the Internship faculty set out to find a solution that would satisfy the defined requirements without putting the students’ health at risk.

Table 2 Internship Goals and Objectives

Internship Goals	
1.	<i>To challenge students to academically develop and apply their learning in the workplace;</i>
2.	<i>To provide an environment where students learn self-awareness and apply their learning in the workplace;</i>
3.	<i>To provide a culmination of the hospitality program by preparing the students for real management situations that they will likely have to deal with by pulling from the program course foundations</i>
4.	<i>To provide students with an opportunity to practice their analytical, oral and written communication skills to apply their substantive learning.</i>

How to Identify LIR Issue Categories

There are two factors that make this important for both educators and practitioners in the Hospitality Industry. The first factor is the introduction of a new tool – the Learning Interaction Report. The second factor is the unique way in which we utilize checklist and keyword analysis to extrapolate usable data from seemingly random comments. In this section, we will explain how to use these techniques to create Issue Categories that enable the analysis and empower the user.

In a 2012 article, information from online comments (such as Yelp Reviews) were used to identify quality problems among a competitive set of brands (Quain, Scales and Albano, 2012). In that article, the researchers scoured the web, looking for pertinent reviews, and then categorized the comments into useable sets of complaints. For example, if a hotel from the competitive set had 10 reviews (comments) from guests and five of them mentioned things like “the air conditioner did not work,” three of them mentioned “the room smelled like smoke,” and the remaining two were “I had to wait a long time to check in,” three categories would have been established: 1. Air conditioning problems, 2. Stale air problems, and 3. Slow check in. The readers would have been advised to use the 80/20 rule’s principles and work on the biggest problem first(Quain, Scales and Albano, 2012).

However, an even more important lesson came from the ability to track data internally – in both a quantitative and qualitative format. One of the things that improved the faculty’s ability to use this data was a co-operative agreement with a faculty member from another university. This outside faculty member brought new data analysis skills and turned qualitative data into meaningful strategies and tactics. This was an enormous help in making quick, meaningful changes during COVID.

The analysis of the individual LIRs that the students submitted is similar, except there was more complex wording. For this reason, keyword analysis was added to the tools used to create the categories. Keyword analysis is the process of looking through the comments, and identifying words or phrases that are repeated, refining the initial results, and conducting additional keyword searches. The object is to find related phrases and words and to continue refining the searches until it is possible to separate the majority of the results into just a few categories. In the current research, over 600 LIRs were distilled into 19 categories ranging from areas such as marketing to housekeeping issues to career development skills.

Learning Interaction Report Data

At the conclusion of each semester, from 2016 – 2019, LIR data was downloaded from Blackboard. In addition to the student’s qualitative comments, valuable objective data was available such as student’s name, location and type of Internship. This information was carefully coded, to make analysis easier, and to protect the identity of the students. To prepare the data for a quick analysis, a spreadsheet was created with the column headings depicted in Table 3.

Table 3 LIR Data in Spreadsheet Headings

Column in Spreadsheet	Heading
A	Unique ID
B	Gender
C	Course Term
D	Employer
E	Location
F	Job Title
G	LIR Impact Class
H	Employer Type
I	LIR Full Comments
J	Interaction

While some of the column headings are self-evident, Figure 2 represents some of the unique characteristics of this spreadsheet.

Figure 2 LIR Sample Report

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Unique ID	Gender	Term	Employer	Location	Job title	Emp. Type	Impact Class	Full Comments	Interaction
001.1	female	S 16	Arlington	NJ	Front desk	Hotel	Hotel Ops	We sent ...	POS/PMS
001.2	female	S 16	Arlington	NJ	Front desk	Hotel	Marketing	Late check in...	Guest Service

- Column A, Unique ID – Each student was required to submit 5 LIRs. The student in this example took the course in Spring 2016 (Column C). She was the first student on our list, so her ID is student 001. In row 1, we have the information for her first LIR. The unique ID for this row is a combination of her student ID (001), and a number denoting that this is her first of 5 LIRs (001.1). In the second row, the unique ID is for her second LIR (001.2). In the second row, all of the “static data” is the same, such as Employer Type, Gender, etc. The only subjective data is for the LIR Impact Class, LIR Full comments, and Interaction Category. These are explained below.
- Column G, Primary Employer Type – In this case, student 001 worked for the Arlington Hotel in New Jersey. After recording all of the data, we went back to the spreadsheet and “coded” each employer type. We identified eight unique employer types, and each were assigned a number. “Hotels” were coded as 02.
- Column H, LIR Impact Class – For each of the five LIRs that student 001 reported, she told us which class had the most impact on helping her resolve the interaction. For example, in interaction 001.1, she described how she re-assigned a room to a guest, by working through the Property Management System (PMS). The class that helped her (known as the Impact Class), was Hotel Operations – a required core class. We later coded each of the Impact Classes, in order to make it easier to do the analysis.

- Column I, LIR Full Comments – All the students submitted their LIRs on Blackboard Learning Management System. These comments were downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet.
- Column J, Interaction Category – In order to analyze the all-important Learning Interaction Reports, we grouped data into “Issue Categories.”

A quick look at the Issue Categories defined by the researchers, depicted in Table 4, showed that students working at in-person Internships were spending their time on operational issues. For example, the categories represented issues such as accounting, inventory and cost control. There were no categories such as strategic thinking.

Table 4 LIR Categories

Number	Category
1	Accounting/Inventory/Cost Control
2	Beverage Management
3	Casino
4	Food/Menu/Kitchen
5	Guest Service Interactions
6	Housekeeping
7	HR/Employee Issues
8	Layouts/Fire codes/Facilities/Equipment/Maintenance
9	Legal
10	Marketing
11	Other
12	POS/PMS
13	Self-Growth
14	Special Events
15	Sustainability
16	Training

Using the Issue Categories as a guide, the faculty began to consider the Internship environment more globally, and to consider outside factors that impacted the overall delivery of the experience. For example, the degree to which the supervisor would integrate the student into managerial duties; not just operation assignments, could vastly improve the quality of the experience for the student.

RESULTS

Specific Findings Regarding Course Objectives

There were two main course objectives students were not meeting, primarily due to the inconsistency of the Internship experience. The first objective “Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of management in the various segments of the hospitality and tourism industry” was clearly not being met by conducting a simple review of the job titles of the interns. Many students were not getting management training in major concepts, such as accounting or statistical analysis, with an aim towards using that analysis to communicate important information. Additional communication skills indicate that computer literacy, namely, Word, Excel, databases and the internet are of paramount importance. However, one important finding of the data analysis is that these programs were not being utilized by the students during their Internships. The programs were used for schoolwork but were not reinforced on the job.

Job Tour Videos (JTVs)

When the first Internship course was developed in Spring 2016, a goal of the course was to increase the students' active reflection. Both the LIRs and the JTVs require students to recall and present information, and to explain it in such a way that others can obtain a sense of the Internship. The Job Tour Videos were designed to be informative and engaging – using multiple visual cues and clues.

While the LIRs were designed to capture one incident, the JTVs were designed to tell a story, giving the viewer a sense of the “Big Picture” on the job site. While the quality of the students' JTVs varied, they were all authentic views of the various Internship jobs that each student held.

Each JTV was approximately ten minutes long and was an actual “tour” of the workplace. Students were also expected to offer information about the technology they used, interaction with other staff members and with the customers, interesting facts that would enhance the viewer's appreciation for the Internship situation, and comments on which courses helped them to accomplish their jobs.

As the instructors reviewed all videos, the disparity between Internship experiences became even more apparent. Some students had rather menial jobs, while others were involved in higher-level operational positions. Some students had more interaction/assistance from their supervisors, and a few had little interaction with basic management tasks. This confirmed the need for a unifying operational tool that would deliver a consistent level of managerial experience to the students – no matter if it was for the virtual course, or the long-term “normal” Internship experience. The JTVs provided both an in-the-moment learning experience, and more importantly, a wake-up call that a tool like the Simulation Exercise was needed to insure a consistent Internship experience for all Stockton Hospitality students.

When the Internship course went virtual in summer 2020, some of the JTVs were re-purposed. Obviously, the students in the summer Internship course couldn't create their own JTVs, so faculty reviewed all JTVs and selected 12 of them to use in the virtual course. These videos were selected on the basis of their overall quality, for the specific “lessons” that they might teach, and for the industry segment they represented. In order to bring them up to date, the summer 2020 Internship instructors contacted the 12 students who made the videos (now alumni) and interviewed them. In the interviews, the alumni updated their biographies, and offered advice to the current students. In addition, each alumna/alumnus answered a few basic questions, including, “Which courses helped you with both your Internship, and with your current career.”

Certainly, the LIRs provided much more actual *data* for the Internal Research Report than the JTVs, but both tools were essential in establishing the need for more consistency in management practices for operations. In the new, temporary summer 2020 virtual Internship course, prior years' LIRs were not permitted to be used as direct teaching aids as they contained sensitive information. However, the 12 JTVs with the current alumni video interviews were an important part of the course offering. Both tools provided easily recognizable evidence that a Simulation Exercise was needed; perhaps even when the Internship course returned to traditional face-to-face presentation formats.

While there is no one-to-one relationship between the four courses and the four cornerstones, the impact of the Four-Course Sequence on the overall experiential learning goals was substantial and complete. When the faculty did have to radically alter (at least temporarily) the Internship course structure during the summer of 2020, they had the luxury of working with a *series* of courses. For example, even though students in the Summer 2020 Internship course did not actually work in traditional hospitality businesses such as hotels and restaurants, they all still completed the 400 hours of the Professional Work Experience course, the career-building opportunities afforded in the Career Development course, and the integrative “Capstone” experiences in the Policies course.

Meeting the Challenge to Integrate Classrooms and Workplaces in Experiential Design

In their summative analysis of the state of Internship Research and Theory in the Hospitality Industry, Stansbie, Nash & Chang (2016) left their readers with a call for further research when they wrote, “The competitive environment for higher education today requires academic leaders to be proactive in searching for new strategies to enrich their curriculum and find more meaningful connections between the classroom and the practice of industry.” Stansbie, Nash & Chang (2016) further state, “Students with industry experience, with exposure to an array of management competencies, enhanced networking and an ability to comprehend theory, needs to be complemented with practical experience.”

As it turned out, the two unique tools of LIRs and JTVs did exactly that. However, for both tools, students were required (in LIRs) and encouraged (in JTVs) to specifically cross reference Internship experiences with specific courses from the Hospitality and Business curriculums. Later, when it became necessary to dramatically re-design the Internship experience to cope with the impacts of COVID-19, the faculty were able to draw upon the existing store of Internal data that was available in the LIR and JTV analyses. In addition, the JTVs became an important teaching tool in the newly re-designed Internship course, giving students a second-hand (but valuable) look into a variety of Internship experiences. That guided tour was provided courtesy of Stockton Alumni, who had recently taken the Internship course themselves, and could therefore help current students learn from previous students’ experiences.

With all of the factors that are outlined above, the faculty was ready to make a radical decision. They voted unanimously to temporarily revise the course, developing a “virtual” Internship experience that *approximated* the important factors that a live, face-to-face Internship experience would provide; and eliminating ANY requirement that the student had to work as an employee for any organization in order to satisfy their Internship class requirement.

It is important to consider the timing of this decision in order to understand just how radical it was. At the beginning of the pandemic in the Spring of 2020, no one knew what was going to happen during the summer months. At this point in time, the University had not yet banned summer Internships (eventually all summer Internships were indeed banned). Some students had moved back to their hometowns in states where the shut-down had not yet been mandatory. All these factors made it even more difficult for the Hospitality faculty to make their decision to completely change the Internship course.

With a unanimous mandate, the faculty began to develop an Internship course that met as many existing goals for experiential learning as possible, but that would be deliverable *virtually*, with no job requirements. This would have been an almost impossible task if it wasn’t for the support of the faculty, the University and the new analyses of the Internal data. While it was not possible to fulfill all the Internship goals, the Internship faculty did identify specific outcomes that a virtual Internship could achieve.

With the goals in mind, the Internship faculty focused on the qualitative Internship experience data analysis which was primarily obtained from the keyword analysis completed within the LIRs. This data indicated that the most valuable learning experiences were *operational* in nature, and involved interactions among guests, management, interns, and the employing company’s operational procedures. This led the Internship faculty members to focus on experiences that highlighted operational actions. To accomplish this, the Internship faculty decided to simulate an operation, and require the students to manage daily operations. The students then had to report on the operations to a supervisor. In addition, the faculty wanted to expose the summer Internship students to real-life experiences from Internship alumni. For both of these data-driven reasons, the faculty sought out a suitable Simulation Exercise, and reviewed tools from the past Internship classes.

The revised course was one where the students could have an experience that still resembled the original Internship course designed for the four-course sequence. The faculty revised the course basics in late April/early May, 2020 and began the actual delivery just two weeks later. The revised course ran 12 weeks and ended on August 10, 2020. By the time the revised course started, none of the 42 students were living on campus. Most of them were living with parents, and some of them were actually working at summer jobs. With every student in a different living/learning/time situation, delivering the revised course became quite difficult.

DISCUSSION

Overcoming Disparate Internship Experiences – Now and In the Future

In response to the data showing that students have unequal Internship experiences, the Internship faculty team designed a two-part solution. First, require the students to use a Simulation Exercise that was almost entirely operational in focus, and second, to teach them to build spreadsheets and a website to present operational analyses to a fictitious Regional Director. These two activities help create the foundation of the four constructs that Miettinen indicates are important (Miettinen, 2000).

The Simulation Exercise was a multi-faceted exercise where the students owned and operated three hospitality businesses. They performed a total of four simulations, each covering 90 days of operations. For the most complicated business, the Sandwich Restaurant, the students ran six months of operations, or two fiscal quarters. They used the fiscal quarter from the Sandwich Restaurant to run their analyses in the spreadsheets on the website and also to create the reporting for the Regional Director. Below is a summary of the experience, and some examples of both the simulation software and the website and spreadsheet organization. The Simulation Exercise that best met the *operational* focus was “GoVenture Small Business” by MediaSpark (<http://mediaspark.com/>).

The Simulation Exercise

GoVenture Small Business is an operational simulation that gives participants a very realistic experience. The simulation has four businesses: Ice Cream Shop, Coffee Shop, Sandwich Restaurant, and Music Store. The faculty team discarded the Music Store and set up a curriculum that focused on the three hospitality businesses. The solution cost per person is nominal, and anyone with an internet connection is able to use the software. Additionally, all spreadsheets and presentation software used are parts of the Google Suite of applications and are free.

There were many factors that made the simulations realistic. Students had to select vendors, and make critical choices regarding cost versus quality, delivery, service type and price. Figure 3 depicts a sample of these decision criteria.

Figure 3 Supplier Choices

Review the suppliers from which you can purchase inventory. Your Current Credit shows the maximum amount of money you can owe each supplier.

Supplier	Quality	Average Price	Shipping Options	Original Credit	Current Credit
Nature's Best	High	\$0.40	7 days (\$30 + 3%) 5 days (\$50 + 3%) 3 days (\$70 + 3%) Min Cost: \$100	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00
Dave's Dairy	Moderate	\$0.34	5 days (\$40 + 5%) 3 days (\$60 + 5%) Min Cost: \$75	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00
Robert & Black	Moderate	\$0.37	3 days (\$50 + 5%) 1 day (\$70 + 5%) Min Cost: \$50	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00
QuickShip Food	Economy	\$0.28	3 days (\$45 + 5%) 1 day (\$65 + 5%) Min Cost: \$75	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00
Slow Foods	Economy	\$0.25	7 days (\$20 + 10%)	\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00

Products Inventory **Suppliers** Order Inventory Review Orders

Additionally, the students had to select staff. The students had to read resumes for potential hires, and review information about the applicants' availability and "career intentions" such as whether the applicant was looking for full or part time employment. These criteria greatly impacted both scheduling and employee morale factor. Figure 4 depicts a sample resume.

Figure 4 Resume Review

Review resumes and hire new employees. Click on a name to review the person's resume and reference. To hire, make a salary offer that you determine will meet or exceed the candidate's expected salary.

1 Choose Person

- Akashri
- Andy
- Annie
- Bernard
- Charles

2 Set Salary Offer

\$6.00 / HR

3 Make Offer



Career Goal
To work in a busy sales environment so that I can improve my language skills and eventually become a senior sales manager for a GoVenture City big business.

Education
Bachelors degree, Operations Management and Ergonomics, University of Momba
MBA, Sales & Marketing Management, University of New Dell

Work Experience
Senior Vice President, Purchasing and Inventory, Jaffro Linen Factory, 10 years
Marketing Assistant, Vikram Advertising Agency, 2 years

The students also had to determine their own goals and tolerance for work/home balance. There was a clock that was *always* running during the simulation periods, and the number of hours the student spent at work were reflected in a "Manager Stress Level" report. Students had to make decisions that would put the hours spent at work in line with their stated goals – a valuable lesson!

The students had to manage customer service. There were several reasons why guests would leave without being served. These ranged from "not enough staff scheduled," to "not enough inventory". Inventory was greatly impacted by delivery time, and some of the vendors had better delivery times, but higher costs. This forced the students to make hard choices between lower costs but better sales. The same logic applied to the staffing levels. Figure 5 depicts a quarterly report for guests served, along with a guest satisfaction

rating report. Another critical measure the simulation provided was the number of customers who arrived and the number served vs. the number who left without purchasing.

Figure 5 Quarterly Report - Guests Served

Customers:	Avg. Daily / Total
- Arrived	386 / 1,547
- Served	46 / 186
- Lost	345 / 1,382
Market Share	Avg. Daily / Ending
Customer Satisfaction	34% / 37%
	Not Pleased / Very Displeased

The simulation also generated a number of useful reports, including a very detailed Income Statement (Figure 6). However, the simulation did not have any report-outs to superiors. To address this deficiency, a "report to Regional Director" exercise was created. Students had to read the income statements produced by the software and create consolidated "executive" reports.

Figure 6 Income Statement

GoVenture Small Business		FINANCIAL STATEMENTS	
Owner: Phil			
Printed: Tuesday, July 14, 2020			
Revenue		Total Payroll & Related Expn \$0	
Sales	\$385	Professional Fees	\$0
Discounts/Returns	\$0	Accounting	\$0
Net Revenue	\$385	Total Professional Fees	\$0
Cost of Sales	\$347	Repairs & Maintenance	\$0
Total Cost of Sales	\$347	Rent & Utilities	\$1,000
Gross Profit	\$41	Total Operating Expenses	\$1,275
Operating Expenses		Net Operating Income/(Loss)	(\$1,234)
Advertising	\$0	Non-Operating Income/(Expense)	\$0
Tv	\$0	Net Income/(Loss) before tax	\$0
Radio	\$0	Net Income/(Loss)	(\$1,234)
Newspaper	\$0		
Direct Mail	\$0		
Event	\$0		
Events	\$0		
Sponsorship	\$0		
Off-Invoice	\$0		
Website	\$0		
Total Advertising	\$0		
Bank Charges	\$0		
Communications	\$0		
Depreciation and Amortization	\$0		
Plant & Equipment	\$0		
Total Depreciation and Amort	\$0		
Insurance	\$0		
Interest Expense	\$0		
Interest on Bank Loans	\$0		
Other Interest & Penalties	\$0		
Total Interest Expense	\$0		
Legal Expenses	\$1,500		
Legal Fees	\$1,500		
Licenses & Permits	\$175		
Total Legal Expenses	\$1,775		
Marketing & Promotion	\$1,500		
Design & Printing	\$1,500		
Promotional Programs	\$0		
Other Marketing Expenses	\$0		
Total Marketing & Promotion	\$1,500		
Miscellaneous Expense	\$0		
Payroll & Related Expenses	\$0		
Employee Wages	\$0		
Owner Wages	\$0		
Payroll Taxes	\$0		
Employee Benefits	\$0		
Incentive Programs	\$0		
Employee Training	\$0		

The Website/Spreadsheets Analyses

To provide even more realism to the Simulation Exercises, the students had to report their results for two quarters of operations at the Sandwich Restaurant. However, the reporting was not just a regurgitation of numbers found on the simulation's standard reports. Instead, students had to create spreadsheets that would summarize important facts, and then calculate additional ratios that were not found in the standard simulation reports. After developing the spreadsheets, and performing the ratio calculations, students did individual analyses on each spreadsheet, and then produced an executive analysis to present to the Regional Director. The three reports included in the executive analysis were human resources, customer service and key income/ratio operating statistics. The key income/ratio operating statistics report required the most intensive searches of the simulation reports, because some of the data required was a subset of larger data. Additionally, students had to develop spreadsheet formulae to calculate specific outputs such as the percentage of costs of goods sold. A sample spreadsheet is depicted in Figure 7.

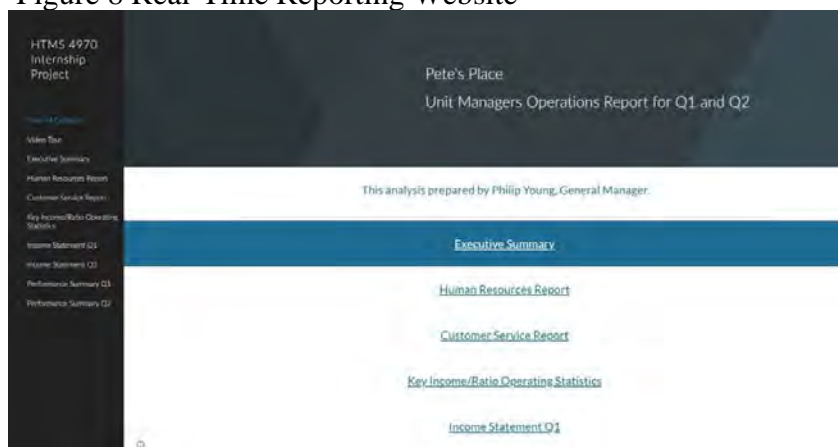
Figure 7 Key Income/Ratio Operating Statistic Report

Ratios									
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Ratios								
2						Q1		Q2	
3	Net Revenue					134,063		137,538	
4									
5	Net Operating Income/(Loss)					27,650		23,350	
6									
7	Cost of Good Sold (COGS)					43,503		42,405	
8									
9	COGS %								
10	(COGS/Net Revenue)					32.45%		30.83%	
11									
12	Labor Costs								
13	Employee Wages					16,783		17,190	
14	Benefits					0		0	
15	Incentives					0		0	
16	Taxes					2,256		2,297	
17	Total					19,039		19,487	
18									
19									
20	Labor Cost %								
21	(total labor cost/total revenue)					14.20%		14.17%	
22									
23									

Real-Time Reporting Website

Two key skills the faculty team members wanted to ensure their Internship students developed were communicating effectively and using technology, both of which are well-defined goals for Hospitality students at Stockton University. To do this, the faculty required the students to use Google Sites to build a website with real-time reporting from spreadsheets. The Google Suite platform gives the students free access to a plethora of tools that can be utilized to accomplish this goal. The best part of the Google Suite is that all data and reports are shareable in real time. For example, when students create both the Google Site website and the Google Sheets spreadsheets, they can display the spreadsheets in their Google Site but update them from Google Sheets, thereby producing a website that automatically updates the spreadsheets. This is excellent for working in teams, which is an additional goal of the Hospitality Program. While the Internship students were not physically able to work in teams during the Summer of 2020, they had worked in teams in both the career and policy classes. To make the information even more accessible, the faculty taught the students to set up a “Table of Contents” home page on their website that included hyperlinks to all reports and spreadsheets (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Real-Time Reporting Website



Consistently Developing a Competitive Advantage

As previously noted, the faculty team was concerned by findings in the analysis of the LIR data that indicated an inconsistent Internship experience, not just during the worldwide pandemic but for the Internship course in general. Through the use of the operationally-oriented Simulation Exercise and the

website/spreadsheet/reporting system, the faculty created a more consistent approach to Internships that will generate long-term impact of the results of utilizing experiential learning courses. Early results indicate that they had strong success from this tactic.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The Hospitality Faculty at Stockton University, like most faculty, believe in Continuous Improvement. Again, like many faculty teams, they set well-defined goals and objectives and then assess their ability to deliver on those objectives. This process made it possible to make last-minute adjustments to core classes in response to the COVID Emergency in summer 2020, but it also resulted in a dynamic change to the Internship Course that remained in place when students were once again able to find Internship positions. The entire process was enhanced by a powerful innovation in internship journaling, and the fortuitous discovery that there were gaps in the Internship experience. The most noticeable gap was that some students had more management responsibility than others during the Internships. This gap was bridged by using a Simulation Exercise. The two major results of the entire continuous improvement cycle were that the students who took the Internship course during the COVID Pandemic still received a viable and worthwhile experience and *all* the students who will take the Internship course in the future will receive a better educational experience.

In response to changing economic conditions in the Atlantic City Hospitality Industry in 2014, The Hospitality faculty completely redesigned the existing Co-Op structure of Internship, and substituted a four-course sequence, known as the Experiential Learning Sequence. The Internship course was totally reformatted, making it an “any-time, any-where” course. To integrate students’ feedback on working conditions, the faculty developed two tools – Learning Interaction Reports (LIR’s) and Job Tour Videos (JTV’s). The LIRs had the greatest long-term impact on curricular success because the data gathered from those LIR journal entries provided meaningful data for determining 1) the kinds of Internship experiences students found most helpful, 2) The University courses that supported the students’ abilities to meet on-the-job needs, and 3) made it clear that students were not experiencing equal opportunities for growth and learning on their Internship jobs.

Fortunately, as part of the regular assessment cycle, key faculty members were compiling and analyzing the data from the LIRs and had just completed a major research-driven set of observations about the Internship process. Working in combination with outside faculty experts, the data, and the recommendations from the analysis, were just completed in early Spring of 2020. When the faculty needed to make massive adjustments to meet the challenges of COVID 19’s industry-wide shutdown, the research findings had just been released internally. However, this was not just a matter of luck. It was the result of adherence to excellent educational principles. Today, in Summer 2021, the Internship students are again at work in the Hospitality Industry. However, this summer, their online Internship course includes a required Simulation experience, that is designed to deliver standardized lessons to complement the on-the-job experiences and give all Internship students similar managerial training.

What’s next for the Hospitality Program at Stockton University? The faculty is more dedicated than ever to the concepts of Continuous Improvement through careful assessment.

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