

College Senior Interns Satisfaction Concerning Intern Station Supervisor Performance

S.K. Johnson,
J.M. Johnson

*Department of Agricultural Services & Development, Tarleton State University,
Stephenville, TX 76402-0040*

ABSTRACT

Faculty in the Department of Agricultural Services and Development at Tarleton State University supervise 45-55 agri-industry interns each year. This study covered a five and one half year period and interns who were placed in a broad range of agricultural occupations. This study had as one objective to determine the satisfaction level of interns toward the performance of selected tasks by their supervisors. The responses were studied according to the various types of occupations. The training stations were divided into the following six groups: agricultural sales, extension service, other governmental agencies, agricultural communications, production oriented companies, and companies supplying technological services.

The order of rankings according to satisfaction of interns was: (1) sales, (2) extension, (3) other governmental agencies, (4) agri-communication, (5) production, (6) technological services. Sales were significantly higher than all categories except extension. Technology scored significantly lower than all categories except production.

The study also divided interns according to type of compensation. Two categories were established - paid and non-paid. It was found that interns who were not paid were significantly more satisfied with the performance of their supervisors than those who were paid.

KEYWORDS: Satisfaction, agri-industry interns

INTRODUCTION

Internships have been used by both education and private industry for a relatively long period of time. However, in the field of agricultural education most of the activity began in the 1960's with the advent of the cooperative part-time training program. These programs placed secondary students in agricultural employment areas for a part of each school day.

In recent years, internships have become very popular and important in most academic disciplines and in all types of private enterprise. Internships seem to come in a variety of formats. The internships vary in length, amount of structure and supervision, type of compensation, and evaluation.

The Agricultural Services and Development Department at Tarleton State University provides internship opportunities to approximately 45 to 55 students per year. These interns are in addition to approximately the same number who are placed into teaching internships in the public schools. The interns are distinguished from each other by the names of "teaching interns" and "agri-industry interns". This study covered a period of five and a half years or eleven semesters and dealt with only the agri-industry interns.

Considerable work has been dedicated to evaluating student teaching interns and structuring high school teachers as supervisors. However, little has been done in the agri-industry intern area. At Tarleton State, both type of interns are structured in essentially the same manner. The grade point requirements are the same. The class preparations are the same up until the final semester, and the length of internships are the same. Each intern spends one third of the semester at the university in specialized training and the other two-thirds of the semester at the training station. Both are supervised by a university coordinator during their internship, and both are brought back to the university at the end of the internship. This study evolved from a concern of the university faculty that quality of training among the industry interns might vary more than among teaching interns. Agri-industry supervisors usually change from one semester to the next. No formal training program is held to train the supervisors as in the student teaching area. Therefore, there was a need to know more about how interns felt toward their supervisors and the type of training and assistance they had received.

THEORETICAL / LITERATURE BASE

The importance of evaluating performance of supervisors responsible for the education and training of students has been a widely accepted concept for educators throughout the years. However, research dealing with the perceptions of university interns concerning training in the various facets of the agricultural industry appear to be very limited.

One concern of interns is the length of time the job search requires. Donald (1998) encourages intern supervisors to spend time with the intern on helping with job search strategies which was one of the task areas assessed. He also alludes to the importance of professional contact during the internship.

In a study conducted by Hite and Bellizzi (1986), an examination was made concerning student expectations regarding internship programs. Their findings revealed that students overall viewed internships as valuable learning experiences for which participants should receive academic credit and be financially compensated. He also pointed out that formal training should be provided at the beginning and the supervisor should direct training throughout the internship.

In another study conducted by Garrett and Bauer (1995) where students talked about internship preference, students preferred paid internships.

In a study of students' expectations by Cannon and Arnold (1998), students listed expectations for internships and outcomes from those internships. One expectation observed was that students expected the internship site training to be at least comparable to a new employee's training for the same job.

Many universities and colleges of agriculture have patterned their internship programs after cooperative education programs. One is the high school vocational agricultural cooperative program. Johnson (1978) discussed the importance of planning for cooperative students and planning on spending time with the student. If this did not happen then he suggested that "...any other approach is haphazard and the chance that proper skill will be developed is purely accidental". Williamson (1978) in reference to cooperative employers stresses that the important link in the success of on-the-job-training programs is the willingness of the supervisor to accept many responsibilities for that student's training and success.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to determine levels of satisfaction held by interns at the end of their eleven-week internship concerning selected tasks performed by their industry supervisor. The responses were studied according to the type of occupation and as to the type of pay received by the intern.

The specific objectives for the study included:

1. Determine if significant differences existed in the satisfaction levels expressed by interns among the six types of agri-industry employment.
2. Determine if a significant level of difference existed between the satisfaction levels expressed by interns using the variable of pay or no pay.
3. Determine which tasks performed by agri-industry supervisors received higher satisfaction levels as judged by interns at program completion.

The overall purpose was to obtain data that could be used to develop training materials and educational sessions for agri-industry supervisors. The desired result was to locate areas of strengths and weaknesses so that internships could be a more rewarding and educational fulfilling experience.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The first step was to establish a list of tasks for industry supervisors which were acceptable to all groups including university staff, agri-industry supervisors, and interns. This was accomplished by individual interviews and panel discussions, involving fifteen individuals from the groups mentioned above. Also once a seemingly acceptable list had been established an advisory group of university staff and agri-industry supervisors was formed for final review. It was recognized that the final list did not contain every possible task and was not intended to be all-inclusive. However, the final review panel considered the list to contain all important components, and that it could be used in total to measure the overall effectiveness of supervisors. It was recognized that possibly some types of occupations were better suited for satisfactory performance in some of the skills areas than were others. However, the advisory group felt it was important that interns receive assistance in each of the items on the list regardless of where the assistance was initiated.

The items or task on the final list were then developed into a questionnaire employing a five point Likert Scale of Satisfaction. 1 = very satisfied, 2 = satisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = dissatisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied. University interns were asked to respond as to their satisfaction on fifteen different tasks. The responses were solicited on the completion of their internship. Respondents were assured confidentiality of their individual responses.

The responses were then divided into six occupational categories according to the nature of work performed at each training station. The groups were agricultural extension, other governmental agencies, agricultural communications, production of agricultural products, agricultural sales, and technological services. An analysis of variance was applied to the groups using the total of all responses. Appropriate t-values were obtained to find significant differences between groups. Then a comparison of Likert scales of intern satisfaction was made by area using analysis of variance with least squares adjusted means. The least squares adjusted means were produced by SAS statistical programs. The significance level set for the study was .05. Also, responses were divided into two groups depending upon whether the intern was paid or non-paid. Approximately 40% of interns received compensation during their internship and the remaining 60% did not.

In order to identify overall supervision strengths and weaknesses, the final step was to determine average overall responses on each of the fifteen tasks.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Two hundred and nine interns were included in the study. The study spanned a period beginning with the fall semester of 1993 and ended with the fall semester of 1998. Table 1 depicts the overall average response of each of the six occupational areas. The 2.35 rating experienced by technological services was the poorest rating of the six occupational categories. However, all responses still fell within the "satisfied" category. It is still apparent that improvements can be made in all occupational categories, especially in agri-communications, agri-production, and technological services.

Table 1. Likert Scales of intern satisfaction by occupational area.

Area	N	Mean
Agricultural Sales	33	1.24
Extension Service	30	1.36
Other Governmental Agencies	64	1.59
Agri-Communications	35	1.88
Agri-Production	18	2.05
Technological Services	29	2.35

Table 2 is a comparison of Likert scales of internship satisfaction by occupational area using analysis of variance with least squares adjusted means. Agri-sales supervisors scored significantly higher than all areas except the Extension Service. Technological services scored significantly lower than all areas except production. Perhaps these observations that production and technological occupation score lower is the result of the more exacting nature of their work where student tasks are performed in the absence of supervisors. Also, the agri-sales could have scored higher because of the constant personal contact of supervisor and student. However, this study is not of the scope to make these conclusions.

Table 2. Comparison of Likert Scales of internship satisfaction by occupational area using ANOVA with least squares adjusted means.

Area	LSMean	Area				
		Extension	Government	Production	Sales	Technological
Agricommunication	1.9	0.006	NS	NS	0.0007	0.02
Extension Services	1.4	-	NS	0.003	NS	0.0001
Other Govt. Agencies	1.6	-	0.02	0.04	0.0001	
Production	2.1			-	0.004	NS
Ag Sales	1.3				-	0.0001
Technological Services	2.4					

The researchers were also interested to see if intern compensation influenced the satisfaction levels. Table 3 shows that non-paid interns were significantly more satisfied than their peers who were paid during their internship. It is possible that supervisors who do not pay interns feel more obligated to assist the student during their internship. This is a topic for further study and cannot be concluded at this point.

Table 3. Least squares mean of paid versus non-paid interns and level of significance.

Type of Compensation	N	LSMean	Significance of Difference
Non-Paid	126	1.39	0.0001
Paid	83	2.17	

The last objective of the study was to gain general information on how well the interns were satisfied with supervisors' performance regardless of occupational area. Table 4 shows the fifteen supervisory tasks and how they ranked in satisfaction levels as perceived by interns upon completion of their internship. Tasks which ranked toward the top of the list are those that university educators emphasized more in communications with intern supervisors.

Table 4. Means of overall satisfaction levels on all supervisors task.

Task of Supervisor	Overall Mean
1. Explaining what was expected of you	1.44
2. Giving you periodic progress reports	1.53
3. Introducing you to other professionals in the field	1.57
4. Showing a sincere interest in helping you better understand Profession.	1.74
5. Involved you in a social and community activity such as service organizations, etc.	1.63
6. Assisting you in learning technical details	1.66
7. Treating you as a professional instead of a student	1.69
8. Allowing you to be involved in the profession by asking your opinions, etc.	1.71
4. Showing a sincere interest in helping you better understand the profession	1.74
9. Providing you with literature that helped you better understand the profession	1.74
10. Exhibiting a positive attitude toward the profession	1.76
11. Explaining career opportunities in the profession	1.77
12. Allowing you to attend in-service meetings and other important meetings	1.77
13. Explaining the overall operation of the business	1.82
14. Assigning you tasks which were professionally challenging	1.87
15. Assisting you in your job search	1.93

IMPORTANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY

The data of this study seemed to indicate that interns in general were satisfied with the performance of assigned tasks of their supervisors. All scores were above the 2.49 average which was required to be in the "satisfied" level. However, there were significant difference in levels of satisfaction among the occupational categories with sales and all types of government employment at the top and more exacting occupations such as agri-communication, production, and technological services at the bottom. It seems obvious that future studies need to be conducted as to the reason for the noted differences.

Also, non-paid interns expressed significantly higher satisfaction rates than paid interns. Speculations can be made as to the reason for this observation, but variables such as attitudes and other factors need to be analyzed before conclusions can be made as to the reason differences existed. The important point is that differences were identified which shows a need for further study on the effect of compensation.

This study was the first initiated by Tarleton State University to analyze the quality of the internship program. Although the study was somewhat limited in scope and depth, areas were identified that lead to future studies in directions which could quite possibly result in an improved internship program.

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