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Odds at a Job: The Post – Graduate Success of NNGO Students.

By Deja Denia Randle
BACKGROUND

This study is being conducted to examine the possible relationship between students who do paid internships in undergrad and their employment success after graduating. This study also seeks to measure the employment trends of graduates from the Nonprofit and NGO studies major.

ABSTRACT

This capstone is a case study on graduates from Northern Illinois University who majored, minored, or received a certificate in Nonprofit and NGO studies. This qualitative and quantitative study seeks to measure the employment trends of graduates from the Nonprofit and NGO studies major. As well as make a comparison between the post-graduate experiences of graduates who interned via the Center for Nonprofit and NGO studies and graduates who didn’t. Prior research suggests that paid internships generally have a positive correlation with entry-level career success. However, there is not much research on this relationship within the social sector. I’m interested in seeing how NNGO students generally fare in the workforce, and if past interns had an advantage over students who did not intern. I will utilize data gathered from a Qualtrics survey I created, which was administered by Dr. Alicia Schatteman to all graduates of Nonprofit and NGO studies. This data will be used to answer the research questions, “To what extent does interning via the Center for Nonprofit and NGO studies affect the employment of graduates?” and “To what extent does NIU’s Nonprofit and NGO studies graduates achieve substantial salaries?”. The results of this study could give insight to NIU and the Center for Nonprofit and
NGO studies on how they could place students on more successful trajectories in the workforce, and ways they could improve the internship experience and impact. It could also enlighten future or current students on the magnitude of internships via the Center for Nonprofit and NGO studies, and why they should participate in them.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Intern Advantage**

Many students look forward to participating in an internship and gaining real-world experience. It isn’t always guaranteed that this will increase their chances of employment, but studies show it makes a difference. McCoy (2013) found that paid interns working for public, private, or nonprofit organizations received the most job offers. This supports participating internships to further increase success in future employment.

**Internship Satisfaction**

For an internship to be seen as successful, more than a financial incentive must be considered. Many approach internships as if they are jobs to get the most out of them, meaning that they are looking to gain more than just money from what they’re doing. Interns want to be integrated into the organization. D’Abate (2009) conducted a study and surveyed 261 undergraduate students at a liberal arts university who had done internships. D’Abate (2009) found that within this group, task significance appears to be the strongest predictor of internship satisfaction. That is, students are likely to be more satisfied if their work significantly impacts other people and the organization. This is intriguing because it shows evidence that interns value the intrinsic
improvements that internships give. I feel it is important for organizations to know that interns don’t want to be placeholders.

**Interns know their worth**

I think that, in modern times, people are a little less afraid to ask for what they want out of an experience. Especially something as entry-level as an internship. Employers are becoming more and more prepared for a new generation of professionals in some areas. In an article titled, “Who Hires Them and Who Pays Them”, the author says interns are demanding and warns organizations not to be surprised at an intern’s desire to move to specific areas. (2016). This sounds very appropriate, and I think most interns should initiate and tell organizations what they need. Interns are also aware that being an intern is supposed to give you a leg up in your career. So, they are expecting their professions to reflect that. The average first-year salary of paid interns who get jobs after graduation is $52,000, compared to the unpaid intern average of $36,000. (2016) Data like this could increase the expectation of internships and career paths for people who’ve done paid ones. I also think there’s a possibility for an increase in effort from interns if more were paid.

**Paid vs Unpaid:**

There is a long-standing belief that doing an internship in college will increase your chances of employment success. However, it is not completely agreed on if the better ones are paid. It is debatable on whether an internship should automatically be paid, but paid ones show a considerable advantage. Zilvinskis (2020) found further research by NACE (2019) which found
that while there was not necessarily a significant influence on measures of long-term career success, paid interns are much more likely to have accepted a full-time offer in the shorter-term than are unpaid interns or those that have never interned, and students with paid internship experience received nearly 50 percent more job offers than those who had either unpaid or no internship experience. This evidence is extremely exciting because it emphasizes that doing an internship can make a difference. It also solidifies that some organizations actually pay attention and value students taking the extra step. Zilvinskis (2020) also conducted a study to measure the inequities in paid college internships. Zilvinskis (2020) found some of the broad social inequities regarding gender, Asian group membership, and career continue to persist, even after accounting for other background and institutional characteristics, leading to a persistent disadvantage. This data suggests that there is more work to be done on the part of the organizations giving internships. There may be a lack of information or interest. However, the persistence of these problems will take interning backwards.

**Should the internship be major-related?**

This was one factor I’d not considered too much despite it being very relevant. It makes sense to consider only doing major-related internships primarily. There could be an advantage to nonmajor – related internships because they could add more well-rounded skills. Zuo (2019) conducted a study using data gathered from graduates of large university in Eastern China to measure the benefit of major and nonmajor-related internships in career development. Zuo (2019) found that the effects of major-related internships are positive or, in the worst case, neutral across all contexts, but the effects of nonmajor-related internships are neutral or negative across different contexts. This suggests that whenever possible, students should opt for major-
related internships. If none are available, then students should examine whether an internship unrelated to their major will have a neutral or negative effect on their job marketability. This data demonstrates that for the best-case scenario, a person wanting to do an internship should stay within their field. It is interesting to me that it might almost be better to not do an internship at all than do one that is irrelevant to your major or field. Zuo (2019) also found the findings regarding education type suggest that graduates in STEM disciplines are in an advantageous position relative to the job market as long as they do nothing to send negative signals to potential employers, like opting for a nonmajor-related internship. I think that this is significant because it is almost like STEM majors must stay in a box academically to be taken seriously career wise. However, it is not disappointing because it’s not surprising that employers would want interns who have been practicing within their field. The transition from student to intern to employee would be easier, and a lot less training might be needed.

**Nonprofit employee retention**

Employee retention and the leadership pipeline of nonprofits are the subject of many questions today. There are various reasons why nonprofit professionals are having a hard time staying within the nonprofit sector. Linscott (2011) found that although nonprofit professionals are committed and passionate about their work, these up-and-coming leaders have a wide range of options outside of the third sector – options that will provide the ability to create a better work-life balance, access to more competitive salaries, early recruitment and in-service retention, professional development opportunities, and unlimited career advancement. As a result, fewer young and emerging professionals are choosing to pursue their careers in the non-profit sector. Furthermore, mid-level staff are often stifled by lack of upward mobility, resulting in fewer
qualified candidates and a continued poor perception of the non-profit sector. These are all recurring issues that nonprofits haven’t tackled as a community. As a result, not only are existing professionals leaving, new talent is all but attracted to taking their places. Linscott (2011) also found within the next decade, non-profits will need to attract and develop some 640,000 new senior managers – or the equivalent of 2.4 times the number currently employed (Tierney, 2006).

To address these issues, as well as to attract more and better leaders, non-profit organizations will have to structure more competitive management packages in addition to reaching out with recruitment efforts at colleges and graduate schools; and, in most cases, non-profits do not have adequate resources to recruit effectively in these areas (Tierney, 2006). Non-profits currently fall short of the strides that other sectors have made in this area. Here we see that the social sector is falling further and further behind, and instead of trying to rebuild it, people are leaving. There must be a better structure for the third sector. Otherwise, nonprofit professionals will not find balance and/or happiness in their careers and will continue to leave.

Career Development

There are a lot of numbers on employment success and failure for interns. However, there is not much known about how they go about finding a job after graduating. There is no guarantee that they have the confidence in their skills, or even know where to look for the type of job they want. Barnwell (2016) conducted a study on college students who interned at Chesapeake Integrated Behavioral Healthcare during the years 2009-2014. Barnwell (2016) found that because students seek education as a way to enter into their career field, colleges and universities should assist students with preparing for employment after graduation. The ever-changing
employment market causes students to need employment preparation beyond the classroom education. I think this is very important to note because there are so many factors at play after graduation. Institutions aiding past theory and curriculums is necessary because the career is going to be more than classroom education. Students need to know the culture and gain hands-on experience.

**Nonprofit internship impact**

It is usually expected to not get paid when interning for a nonprofit. Many nonprofits aren’t even expected to have the capacity to change this. Capek (2017) conducted a study and surveyed two groups: 52 undergraduate students and 32 nonprofit organizations. Capek (2017) found that according to this study, organizations want the same things for the intern that the intern wants, including helping them gain experience in the field, skills, networking, and other advantages to set them up for success in the future as discussed by Burke & Carton (2013). Yet, 66.7% of organizations with internship programs are not paying their interns. So, the data suggests while nonprofits are saying they want to shift this cycle, they aren’t actively taking the steps to do so. This doesn’t automatically mean that nonprofits are seeking to burn people out. Paying interns as well as staff may be harder said than done. However, the culture of caring about the mission or intangibles being gained being enough should end. Capek (2017) also found the debate, and the responses of unsuspecting students like in the example at the beginning of this article, suggests that unpaid internships are the expectation of some students and “just the way it is”. Rogers (1999) noted that compensation is only moderately associated with successful internships in part due to students’ willingness to take on unpaid internships. Students accept the need to do this as “part of paying their dues” (Rogers, 1999, p. 52). This is a perfect example of the inherent
expectation that going into a nonprofit internship means working hard with no pay. Furthermore, it’s not necessarily a negative assumption, it’s just expected because of lack of growth in that area.

METHODS

The most appropriate way to conduct this study to me would be to use survey research to gather quantitative and qualitative data. I created a survey in Qualtrics and shared it with Dr. Alicia Schatteman to send to approximately 228 NNGO graduates. I used an anonymous 13 – question survey with 11 quantitative questions, and two qualitative questions. The quantitative questions are centered around whether they had an internship in undergrad, was that internship via the NNGO department, when they graduated, and their current job salaries. The qualitative questions ask about job readiness and opinions on salary adequacy. I then used this data to provide comparisons between the employment experiences of graduates who did internships and those who didn’t. I also include data on the qualitative feedback, which will demonstrate job readiness and satisfaction, or lack thereof, among all NNGO respondents.

MEASURES AND RESULTS

*The data in the present study reflects approximately a 25% survey response rate from graduates of the Nonprofit and NGO studies major.
Graduation Year

This question was to measure the graduation time of graduates ranged from 2013 to 2022. Respondents in 2017 and 2020 account for almost 40% of respondents. See Fig 1.

NNGO major, minor, or certificate

This question was to make the distinction between the type of NNGO studies declaration. Approximately 81% of respondents were NNGO majors, with minors coming in at 13.64%, and certificates/other both at 2.27%. See Fig 2.

Fig 1. Bar graph depicting respondent graduation year.

Fig 2. Pie chart of NNGO major distinctions
**Internship Completion**

This question was asked to separate graduates who did and did not intern. The results show that over 80% of respondents completed an internship and just under 20% did not. **See Fig 3.**

**Internship Specification**

Asked to find out how many internships were specifically with the Center for Nonprofit and NGO studies. Exactly 80% of interns in this study did their internship with the Center for NNGO studies, while 20% did not. **See Fig 4.**
Employment Status

Asked to gather data on how many respondents were currently employed. About 76% of them are currently employed. 9.3% are attending graduate school or continuing education, 6.98% are unemployed but seeking employment, and another 6.98% are unemployed but not seeking employment. See Fig 5.
Nonprofit/NPO Employment

Asked to measure how many employed respondents work specifically in the nonprofit sector. The survey found that 72.73% of respondents do work in the nonprofit sector, while 27.27% do not. See Fig 6.

![Fig 6. Respondents Who Work in the Nonprofit Sector](image)

Employment Status Within Six Months

This question was asked to measure how many respondents were employed within six months of graduating. The survey results show that 78.79% of them did get employed in their field within six months, while 21.21% did not. See Fig 7.
Current Salary

As asked to measure the current salaries of respondents and to make a general comparison of those of interned respondents and non-interns. Respondents whose yearly salaries are $31,000 or less account for 6.06%, 33.33% are between $31,000 - $50,000, 36.36% are between $51,000 - $70,000, 18.18% fall between $71,000 - $90,000, and another 6.06% make $91,000 or more. See Fig 8.
Salary Satisfaction

Qualitative question asked to find out if graduates think they are being paid what they’re worth regardless of their yearly salary. The survey results show that only 24.24 % of respondents feel that their pay is adequate, while 45.45% feel that theirs is somewhat adequate, and 30.30% feel that theirs isn’t adequate at all. See Fig 9.

![Fig 9. Respondent Opinion of Salary Adequacy](image)

Break between Employment Searches

Asked to measure how many students took a break after graduating before seeking employment. Majority of NNGO students in this study did not take a break after graduating with 81.40% responding “no”, while 18.60% did take a break. See Fig 10.
Break length

Asked to measure respondents who did take a break and the length of time between break and seeking employment. Around a quarter of respondents took a break for three months or less, at 28.57%, another 28.57% had a break that was three to six months, 14.29% had a break that was six months to a year, and the last 28.57% had a break that was a year or more. See Fig 11.
Job Application Confidence

Asked to find out how many graduates applied to jobs where they did not meet the FULL qualifications. Only 37.21% of respondents applied to jobs where they met all the qualifications, while 62.79% did not limit applications to fully qualified positions. See Fig 12.

![Fig 12. Respondents Who Only Applied to Fully Qualified Positions or Not](image)

Level of Workforce Readiness

A qualitative question asked to measure how prepared students felt for the workforce after graduating from the NNGO major. At almost half of respondents, 54.3% of graduates explicitly state that they felt prepared, confident, and/or excited for the workforce after experiencing the NNGO curriculum and/or internships. While 22.86% explicitly state that they felt unprepared in
some way, 11.43% state that they had influence from grad school, 5.71% were employed before graduating with an organization they related to via the Center for Nonprofit and NGO studies. The last 5.7% of respondents spoke of their skills but did not discuss whether they felt prepared or not.

**Interning Difference (or not?)**

To measure the difference between post-graduate success between interns and non-interns, a filter was used on the Qualtrics data. The results suggest that interning may have an advantage when it comes to confidence in entering the workforce, but maybe not in the long haul. Non-interned graduates make up 9% of total respondents, all were full NNGO majors, and all were employed in their field of study within six months. Also, 75% of non-interned respondents fall in the salary range of $51,000 - $70,000, with 25% having a salary of $91,000 or more. See Fig 13. However, only 25% feel that their salary is adequate and 37.5% explicitly state that they felt prepared after earning their bachelor’s degree.

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**Fig 13. Current Salaries of Respondents Who Didn't Intern**

![](image)

- 25.00% $30,000 or less
- 75.00% $31,000 - $50,000
- 75.00% $51,000 - $70,000
- 75.00% $71,000 - $90,000
- 75.00% $91,000 or more
CONCLUSION

The existing literature on nonprofit paid internships suggests that students could have an advantage in the workforce when they have completed an internship specific to their field. Furthermore, interns seek more than monetary value out of their positions and want to have substantial roles. The existing literature also suggests that the nonprofit sector’s employee retention rate is dropping drastically, due to lacking competitive packages and recruitment
efforts. However, the literature neglects the relationship between nonprofit internships and programs and the nonprofit workforce directly. This study was conducted to analyze that relationship.

**Theoretical Implications**

My study has two central implications for theory and research on nonprofit employee retention and internship impact. First, this study demonstrates that there is a level of dissatisfaction in the nonprofit workforce. Adding to previous employee retention theory (Linscott 2011), this study suggests that, despite the salaries of NNGO graduates, there is still some level of discontent with their compensation, regardless of if they completed an internship. This emphasizes the recurring theme that nonprofit organizations are not paying their employees well enough to keep them. Conclusively, these results show that there may not be a positive correlation between a high salary and job gratification, and that other factors in compensation play a substantial part.

Second, my study also contributes to the literature by contradicting some previous research on the positive relationship between internships and employment (McCoy 2013). This study suggests that paid interns in nonprofit organizations might not receive more job offers. The evidence also agrees with some prior internship research (Zilvinskis 2020) on the theory that paid internships may not have a significant influence on long-term career success. See Fig 13.

**Practical Implications**

It makes a lot of sense for a student to seek out multiple internships before they enter the workforce. This way, they’ll be able to have experience going into entry – level positions and be
a more competitive candidate, but my evidence shows that it may not be necessary. On another note, students may not know the value of a Nonprofit and NGO studies degree because of the expectation of low salaries in the nonprofit sector. However, my study suggests that NNGO graduates can achieve substantial salaries in their fields of study, but overall employment satisfaction is a problem.

There are three main potential practical implications in this study. First, an NNGO major, not a minor or certificate, may not need to complete an internship to secure decent employment. The results of not having an internship were not negative. It would not hurt students to complete an internship in undergrad, but it might not always give them the boost they are looking for. Second, there are great paying careers in the nonprofit sector and students should have confidence in their nonprofit degrees. The survey results suggest that NIU’s Nonprofit and NGO studies curriculum places students on a positive career trajectory. Furthermore, students can take this degree anywhere. See Fig 14. Third, there is a serious problem with the general level of satisfaction in nonprofit professionals with their compensation. Although there is a respectable range of salaries in respondents, this evidence shows there were still only 24% that felt their salaries were adequate. See Fig 9.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this study is the lack of qualitative data, due to limiting qualitative questions for the sake of attempting to increase response rates. So, there may be specific reasons why graduates feel their compensation is inadequate, besides salary, that are lost. Also, there may be a distinction between how graduates felt prepared by the curriculum vs the internships. The second
limitation is the fluctuation of the job market and the fact that there is a different hiring climate for every graduation year. This study does not account for the different employment trends for nonprofit professionals between 2013 and 2022. The last significant limitation is the lack of respondents. There was a decent response rate, however this study possibly may not be a substantial sample size to appropriately reflect the current graduates.

Future Directions

This study leaves space for further research on NNGO students and their post-graduate success. First, there should be data gathered on their feelings of work force preparedness, based on the NNGO curriculum and internship program separately. Second, there should be questioning about compensation that includes categories outside of salary (work/life balance, employee engagement, etc). Third, future research should examine the compensation packages for respondents first position in their field of study after graduating. Fourth, future research could also examine the distinct experiences of double majors.
Reference:


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Xie. “Are All Internships Equally Beneficial? Toward a Contingency Model of Internship