

Internship Recruitment & Selection at Minority Serving Institutions: A Thematic Analysis of Employer Perspectives



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Michael A.R. Sanchez, MS & Mindi N. Thompson, PhD

University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Research on College to Workforce Transitions

INTRODUCTION

Benefits of Internship Completion

Internships are short-term work opportunities designed to allow students to gain experiential learning of real-world tasks (Taylor, 1988). Internships **help** college students **ease the transition** from college to work (Cook et al., 2004; Dailey, 2016), increase the likelihood of **receiving a job interview** (Nunley et al., 2016), **crystalize** their **vocational self-identity** (Brooks et al., 1995), and **enhance career self-confidence** (Ocampo et al., 2020).

Employer Perspectives of Internships

Internships are an important signal to employers that students are **prepared for the workforce** and act as a “foot in the door” to one’s first job (Silva et al., 2016). According to a NACE (2015) study, **72.5% of employers** preferred to hire student candidates with internship experience.

Students of Color Face Barriers to Hiring

Students of color face **discrimination** in recruitment and selection processes, including during **resume screening** (Bertrand & Mullainath, 2004) and **job interviews** (Derous & Ryan, 2012). Such discriminatory practices have consequences. Students of color are more likely to **self-select out** of certain career pathways due to **perceived barriers** to access to educational and career opportunities (Fassinger, 1995; Hora et al., 2020).

Workplace Diversity: Targeted Recruitment

Targeted recruitment involves specific efforts to increase the attractiveness of the organization to a diverse group of applicants (Ryan & Powers, 2012). Efforts include **recruiting at minority-serving higher education institutions**, using gender neutral and **unbiased language** in job ads, and participating in specific job fairs (Avery & McKay, 2006; Wille & Derous, 2017).

Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs)

Minority-serving institutions (MSIs) are lauded for their ability to **increase retention** rates for students of color (Kim, 2011; Owens et al., 2020) and facilitate **student’s psychosocial adjustment to college and careers** (e.g., Gasman et al., 2010). **3.6 million** undergraduates are enrolled in MSIs, representing **20% of all undergraduate students** in the United States (Gasman & Conrad, 2013).

METHOD

Purpose

To understand how employers who recruit college students from MSIs perceive internships.

Research Question

How do employers recruiting from minority-serving institutions (MSIs) describe characteristics of their organization’s internship program?

Participants

9 employers who recruit from MSIs (2 HBCUs, 2 HSIs).

Thematic Analysis (TA) Methodology

- Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using:
 - an **inductive** approach to identifying themes
 - a **semantic** approach in reporting themes, and
 - an **essentialist/realist** epistemology.

Data Collection & Data Analysis

- **Participants** recruited via **snowball sampling** to identify employers who supervise interns.
- 40-minute **semi-structured** phone **interviews**. Interview questions were developed based on existing literature and transcribed orthographically.
- **Data Analysis** in **6 stages** (Braun & Clarke, 2006): **(1)** becoming familiar with the data, **(2)** generating initial themes, **(3)** searching for themes, **(4)** reviewing themes, **(5)** defining & naming themes, and **(6)** producing the report.

IMPLICATIONS & DIRECTIONS

Administrators/Employers

- Foster greater awareness of challenges, benefits, and processes involved in designing and implementing a college internship program. For example,
 - **Providing funding** for transportation to/from internship.
 - Clarifying the **role of the manager** and **standardizing** experience.

RESULTS

Internships are Perceived as Valuable & Important

- “**Socialization** to enter the **profession**.”
- “We want to make sure that [they] have an **educational experience**, that [they] feel if [they] go into any **corporate environment**, they have a little bit **more skills and understanding** as to how it works.”
- “If [the intern manager] is definitely **impressed** in their internship...it’s definitely going to **increase their chances** for what we call **conversion**.”

Internships are Complex to Administer & Structure

- “**Designing the program** and designing their professional development training.”
- “They all go through **orientation**. At the end of summer, they all have a **symposium**, and they all kind of present. So it is that **structure** of this opening and closing. I think what happens in the middle is definitely at the **discretion of the manager**.”

Obstacles to Recruitment & Selection of Students at MSIs

- “**Unconscious bias** with all our recruiters and our hiring managers.”
- “Just because, you know, **you don’t know what an HBCU is** – that does not mean they are **less qualified or more qualified** – you need to do your **due diligence** to be culturally competent because your biases can get in the way.”
- “**Transportation** is a **challenge** and students have **turned down** the role or have even turned down the opportunity to intern – or to interview for an internship.”

Fostering Workplace Diversity: The Role of Internships

- “Conscious effort to **recruit in a diverse market**.”
- “I think within the recruitment process we’ve been **really intentional** about trying to **develop relationships** with the local **HBCUs**...so how do we design a process that is appropriately focused on representing [this city] in all of its diversity.”