Review

Values of internships: Should all students take an internship?

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the types of internships currently implemented, and how students can apply their academic knowledge in work settings which are vigorous components of education. It also explores how internships transition students from institutional environments to the community, abroad and other real world sites for hands on experiences. Thus, the current findings will help students decide whether or not to take an internship. It would further help institution administrators to decide whether to require internships as part of the curriculum and graduation requirements. In order to discuss the length, quantity and benefits of internships, students’ answers are added from the surveys used to find out about their internship experiences.

Key words: Types of internships, curriculum, real-world experience, Saudi female.

INTRODUCTION

A successful and smooth transition from higher education to the real-world is one of the quintessential concerns of higher education intuitions, not only in the US but throughout the whole world. In the past, few higher education institutions were required to have internships, as part of their curriculum and graduation requirements. The main reasons were the type of student population, limited field of study, low enrollments, curriculum etc. Also in the past there were more jobs and fewer applicants or, in some cases, no competition existed in finding good jobs. Students had to simply graduate and jobs were waiting for them. In some cases employers would come to the institutions and offer jobs to senior students.

Things have changed, because of rapid changes in technology, invention of new fields of study, diversity of student population and for other reasons institutions are being forced to align their curriculums. As a result, internships have become an essential part of curriculums. Institutions which do not require internships as a part of their curricula encourage students to enroll in internships prior to graduation, because students face transition problems from education to the work place. Internships can play a key role in facilitating this transition. According to Patricia Cormier-Longwood University, Virginia-president, “These internships give these students an edge that they would not have otherwise” (Burnsed, 2012). Further, Cormier said that, “It always amazes me that higher education didn’t think of this sooner. For me it’s a no-brainer. If you’re going to position your students well, you’ve got to give them this exposure before they graduate” (Burnsed, 2012). Enrollments are at an all-time high and as such today’s graduate faces huge competition to find jobs. The few existing job openings are overcrowded by far too many applicants. As a result, those who are left out end up moving away to other cities, states, provinces or in some cases, other countries to find suitable jobs.

On the one hand, higher education institutions in many countries would not accept students, if they have a five years gap after graduating from high school. On the other hand many countries have no restriction to go back to school. For example, in the US, students have no age limits. As a result, students are entering higher education from varying backgrounds and at different ages, such as: i.) High school students (under the agreement between
INTERNSHIPS

Many people think that internships are only for college or university students. However, they can be taken by students who are enrolled in elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, technical colleges, junior colleges, community colleges, four year colleges, universities, or graduate schools. Additionally, internships can be taken by students in all academic fields, including medical related fields. Students should take their time to look for the right place for internships; a place that matches their interests as they could end up working for the same company after graduating. However sometimes this is not possible. Usually, internships are available at places such as: non-profit groups/organizations (e.g. Habitat for Humanity), government departments (e.g. Department of Energy DOE), private sectors, small to medium size businesses and more (Wikipedia, 2012). In the past internships were limited to the local communities or in the country but now, a new trend is being explored abroad.

The objectives of internships are to provide real-world experience to students, who are looking to explore pertinent knowledge and skills required to enter into a specific career before graduation. Additionally, students should learn how to apply theoretical concept learned in classrooms to the real-world. The reason for this is that one of the purposes of internships is to provide students with experiences other than what students get in the classroom. According to Loretto, “Internships are relatively short term in nature with the primary focus on getting some on the job training and taking what’s learned in the classroom and applying it to the real world” (Loretto, 2012). However, it can be part-time or full-time and last between 5 to 12 weeks, but it can be shorter or longer depending on the company needs and curricula requirements. Some institutions have a different approach when it comes to internships. For example, at Kettering University (KU) (formerly General Motors Institute and GMI Engineering and Management Institute) students attend classes for a semester and work for one semester (KU, 2012). The alternation process continues until the last year when they spend two quarters working and completing a thesis project.

The history of internships or co-ops started in the U.S. in the 1900s (Driscoll, 2006). Northeastern University was the first to start internships in 1909 (Haire and Oloffson, 2009). Similarly, in England slaves were trained to perform certain tasks. During the 11th century, a worker in an apprenticeship would get paid to learn different trades under the guidance of a master. Furthermore, people started working at an early age, as young as 16 years old and in some cases earned food, clothing and housing in exchange for work (Haire and Oloffson, 2009). Internships are a 3 way partnership between students, institutions and places of internships. Therefore, all parties should agree on the end results. A free online dictionary by Farlex defines an intern as, “A student or a recent graduate undergoing supervised practical training” (Farlex, 2012). Further, according to Littke (2004), internship consists of “real work integrated into the everyday world of the school”. Similarly, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) which is involved in providing conferences, professional development, connecting campus recruiting and career services to professionals, delivering best practices trends and research-defines internship as the follow:

An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent. (NACE, 2011).

Names of internships

Terms for internships are different from country to country. Randomly picked countries, in Table 1 indicates some examples of different names for internship. It should be noted that some countries do not specify or require an internship, but integrate it as a part of their curriculum in which they require all students to work in the real-world related to their study, prior to graduation. For example, in Malaysia, interior design/architect students are required to work in the interior design/architecture field prior to graduation.

Types of internships

There are different types of internships and usually they last for 5 - 12 weeks, but can also be shorter or longer.
The length of internships depends on professions and institutions’ curriculum requirements. Some institutions require two internships. However, one is normal although, some students like to take two internships to have an in-depth knowledge of standard practices used in the real-world.

Deborah Federico, an assistant director of undergraduate career services in the school of management at Boston University, who also worked in the corporate world in marketing and market research has created a list of internships: internship for freshmen, sophomore, junior, study abroad, full-time, part-time, summer, academic year, academic credit, pay to get, unpaid, and paid (Federico, 2012). Indeed Wetfeet Magazine (2012), whose mission is to provide information on how to achieve a successful career for job seekers has compiled a quick guide to the most common types of internships such as: cooperative education (co-op), apprenticeship, externship, practicum, field experience, and service learning (Wetfeet, 2012). Each type of internships is described briefly below.

### Table 1. Internship names in different countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Name</th>
<th>Internship Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Work Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>Internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Stage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Estagios (pronounce: lit.-stages)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Co-op (co-operative education)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>Internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Stage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Stage</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>Internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Internship</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Work Experience Internship</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Research or Dissertation Internship</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Virtual Internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Sandwich Placement</td>
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### Freshmen

Many students are aware of internship benefits, prior to starting higher education and would like to take that advantage during freshmen year. There are not too many opportunities available at this stage, but students can gain experience if they find work such as helping a professor in research by collecting data, organizing research documents and other related work.

### Sophomore

Students have ideas of what to study at the sophomore level and would like to explore different opportunities. The best time to take internships is in the summer, at this stage in school. Also, at this point there are more opportunities available as compared to freshmen.

### Junior

At this stage students are mature and have ideas about what they want to do. Therefore, they should make the right choice to pick a company for an internship. In most cases interns are hired at this time. More opportunities are available as compared to sophomores.

### Study abroad

Many institutions have campuses abroad, where students enroll in classes or work and earn credit at their local institutions. This practice is getting popular and many students are enrolling in summer courses not only to earn credit, but to learn about other cultures, ethical values, languages, teaching/learning styles and much more. Students spend a fixed amount of time (i.e. one semester) in other countries by either working in a field of study or taking classes. For example, Pomona College from Claremont, California, has liberal arts education program which strongly believes in and fosters foreign study abroad programs in 31 countries. As a result approximately 50% of students attend study abroad prior
to graduating (Pomona College, 2012). This type of internship is appropriate for those students, who love to learn about other countries, their beliefs, philosophies, and practices performed in the real-world as compared to that of their own country. On the other hand, it is not suitable for all students unless they have a strong desire to learn and work in different cultures and environments. Moreover, in some cases institutions abroad provide housing and food. Not all students enjoy study abroad because of extra expenses and adjustments to the routines of one’s life.

**Full-time**

Students take full-time internship by working 40 plus hours a week during the summer. This type of internship is not possible during major semesters (i.e. fall/spring or fall/winter) because students take full loads. However, many institutions offer classes in the evening, online, weekend, or in some cases meet only once a month over the weekend. In that case students can work full time while attending school. However, it is challenging for them enrolling full-time while working full-time as interns.

**Part-time**

Students take part-time internship during the major semester (i.e. fall/spring or fall/winter), while working less than 40 h and attending school either three quarters or full-time. In many instances, students take part-time internships when they are seniors, because of the low load in the final semester.

**Summer**

Students take a break from institutions in the summer to gain real-world experience. This type of internship is usually full-time but that is not necessarily the case. In many cases students work every summer as long they are in school. For example, construction management students work in a construction management field every summer as long they are in school and in many cases work full-time for the same company after graduating.

**Academic credit**

Students work in companies in exchange for earning credit at school. These credits are part of the curriculum. The companies, students and institutions have an agreement on what to achieve in order to earn credit but many institutions count real-world experiences toward class credit. In this case, students need to document what work they have done to their advisors.

**Pay to get**

In many cases students don’t find internships. A reason for not finding internships could be economic downturn. As a result, students seek help of agencies to find internships in exchange for a fee. In some cases agencies receive money from companies to find interns and also charges students. Students should be able to find internships with the help of institutions, and other resources, including friends, senior students, online resources, associations, advisors, advisory board members, faculties, and many other resources, without paying agencies. Many experts argue whether students should use agencies or not. The same kind of agencies also helps in finding jobs by charging companies and students. These kinds of agencies are very active in the Middle East and count for a high percentage of job seeking resources. Similarly, there are many agencies in the US, which help students in finding internships and jobs. Moreover, for several reasons students do not want to move away from the city of residence, because of family and other commitments and prefer to find internships locally. Some students prefer to have internships close by their residence, but sometime it is hard and not easy to find. For this reason they have no other choice but to seek agency help. For example, Fast Track Internships is the world’s largest direct marketing agency and specializes in finding internships and jobs. According to Dan Kuthy from Michigan State University “My internship had to be located in Lansing where I had an apartment for the summer. Fast Track Internships generated 7 interviews, and I received 5 jobs offers” (Fast Track Internships, 2006).

**Unpaid**

Various internships are unpaid. The unpaid internships depend on locations, types of businesses and fields. Usually, unpaid internships are offered at places such as: charities, non-profit organizations, think tanks, small companies and similar places. The author has been supervising female architecture students’ internship programs for last 4 years and has supervised more than 50 students and contacted many companies regarding internships. He experienced a practice of unpaid internship in Saudi Arabia (KSA), which is contradicting the general practice around the world. Unfortunately, only 9 students earned money from more than 50 interns. Regardless of company policies, students can always ask for a stipend for transportation expenses, housing allowances (in case students move from his/her own city to the internship location) or meals. Many internships experts argue that only wealthy students can take advantage of working unpaid during the summer. On the other hand less wealthy students can’t afford unpaid internships over the summer because summer earning helps students pay bills. In the US the Labor Department is cracking down on firms that fail to pay interns appropriately and is escalating efforts to educate companies, institutions, and students on the laws.
regarding internships so, all 3 parties understand their rights (Greenhouse, 2010).

**Paid**

Paid internships are internships where students get paid. Big companies are the best place to take internships because they pay and can afford to pay. Some companies pay very little but, some pays are okay. Typically, paid internships are offered in fields such as: advertising, technology, business, law, science, architecture, interior design, medical, construction management, engineering and more.

**Cooperative education (co-op)**

Co-ops are designed in a way where classroom-based education is combined with practical work experience. It is defined as, "an educational system in which students may earn academic credit for career work done in their field of study" (Dictionary.com, 2012). Kettering University's curriculum is designed on the co-op philosophy, where students spend a quarter on campus taking classes and the following quarter working in the real-world (Kettering University, 2011).

**Apprenticeship**

Well-trained employees are vital to any effective vocational programs. Therefore, apprenticeship programs are offered with the help of federal and state-approved grants to produce skilled workers. In this program students get paid during a period of apprenticeships while gaining hand on experiences and attending schools (Fried, 2011). Typically, apprenticeships programs have links with unions. This type of program is offered in electrical, plumbing, heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), carpentry, construction, masonry, automotive and many more programs. After graduating from the program, students have the privilege of union membership, its benefits, and are considered well trained in the field of study. Moreover, several junior and community colleges lead in offering apprenticeship and related programs. For example, Lansing Community College (LCC) (2010) offers a four years electrical apprenticeship program, where students enroll in a variety of courses including: fundamentals for electrician, electrical safety, calculation, math, national electrical code (NEC) and many other classes (LCC Construction Apprentice Curriculum, 2010).

**Externship (also called job shadowing)**

Students spend short time on the jobs by observing or working with experienced professionals to see how work is done in the real-world. Also, it gives students ideas about the work environment. In the same manner an educational program is offered in the US and Canada called "Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day" (Wikipedia, 2012). On the specific day, parents take their kids to work for a day. This activity is incorporated in schools curricula and is taught during the same week.

**Practicum**

In practicum, students apply theory learned in classes to the real-world. Additionally, students work individually or in a group with advisors and company supervisors. For example, interior design students work with a local design firm to design interior design projects but are supervised by faculty members. One of the biggest advantages of practicums is networking with professionals, which would help in finding jobs after graduating. Commonly, practicums are used in the medical related fields, especially in psychology.

**Field experience**

In field experience students learn the skills of interpreting data, mapping, recording and observing surrounding environments. For examples, interior design/architecture students are asked to find either high load or low load areas, observe environments, and write reports (Menconi and Pollack, 2005). In the same way students are asked to visit construction sites, observe how construction work is done, ask questions from workers and site supervisors and write reports.

**Service learning**

Students perform community service work related to the fields of study for benefit of the community, where they integrate hands-on experiences in a course. For example, architecture/interior design/construction management students design a new residential or renovating project for Habitat For Humanity (HFH). Here they have an actual client (i.e. family awarded a house) a HFH director, and a HFH construction committee members to discuss design or renovation requirements. After collecting information, as in the real-world, design/renovation work is completed under the faculty members’ supervision. Many institutions offers courses related to service learning where students earn credit and also fulfill the requirements of internships. For example, Arizona State University (ASU) (2010) offers a series of courses for different major students. One of the course numbers and titles according to the university website is, “USL 402 Service Learning: Child Tutoring”. Further, the course description of the same course is, “Students research and analyze social justice and community
issues affecting ethnic minorities and marginalized populations specifically as they relate to the education system, drawing upon their service experiences to inform discussion and written assignments” (ASU, 2010). This specific course requires students to spend approximately 100 hours with a pre-approved ASU service learning community partner. Moreover, this course requires a prerequisite just as is required for other courses, and is recommended for juniors, seniors, and graduate students.

**International students**

International students are also required to do internships as part of an institution’s graduation requirement. Internship requirements are different from country to country. It is easy (e.g. no F-1 or J-1 visa required) to take internships if international students are studying in the KSA. However, they need to get special permission from the international students’ office. On the other hand, in the US requirements are different from state to state, but they all follow the same basic requirements. According to Konrad and Rhoads (2010), in the US regarding international students’ internships, “An international student can take the internship only if he or she has proper foreign student work authorization (i.e. F-1 optional practical training or curricular practical training; or J-1 academic training)” (Konrad & Rhoads, 2010).

**Internships versus No internships**

Most institutions require internships but few don’t. Institutions have their own reasons for requiring or not. Likewise, many institutions design their curriculum in a way where they train students for the real-world, while teaching theory concepts. Similarly, some institutions have advanced labs and are involved in research, which help students to have real-world experiences while they are in school. For example, the University of Michigan (UoM) electrical engineering curriculum does not require an internship. But, students work on many real-world projects. At the same time, advisors encourage students to take internships. Students who have taken internships have an upper hand compared to ones who have not taken any.

The interns have more chances to be hired in the same company where they were taking their internships, then someone being hired from outside. It is a great way to get a foot in the door of future employment. According to Federico, a study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) found that the “42 percent of the seniors with internship experience who applied for the job received at least one job offer, compared to only 31% of seniors who had no internship experience” (Federico, 2012). Further, NACE conducted survey of 50,000 colleges and universities students from 50 states, which revealed that more than half of the responding seniors had an internship or co-op experiences (NACE, 2011 Research, p.5) Similarly, Holly Paul, who is the national recruiting leader at PricewaterhouseCoopers says that “schools that focus in on accommodating internships as part of their course curriculum position their students perform very well for future employment” (Burnsed, 2012). Moreover, according to Vandewater (2012), some of the benefits of internships are: it’s not free labor, it’s free training, it’s a career fitting room, a foot in the door, networking, less responsibility, and more. Further, NACE conducted a survey in 2011 which revealed that nearly 50% of internships were unpaid and unpaid internship offers no advantage to the job-seeking student (NACE, 2011 Research p. 5). Finally, there is no doubt that internship programs produced several successful individual such as Brian Williams, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates and many more famous people (Haire and Oloffson, 2009).

**Benefits of internships**

There are numerous benefits of taking internships. They provide invaluable experiences and can change a student’s life, including the way they think. Some of the internships benefits are listed below:

i.) It changes a students’ maturity level.
ii.) Improves their writing skills. For example, a construction project supervisor writes several memos on a regular basis. This practice would improve an intern’s writing skills.
iii.) It improves their organizational skills.
iv.) It helps improve self-confidence.

v.) It provides networking opportunities. For example, interns meet many professionals.

vi.) It is a working career fitting room.

vii.) They learn how to work in a group in real projects.

viii.) It provides opportunities to have a foot in the door. For example, company would prefer to hire interns if a full-time position opens in the company.

ix.) It is not free labor, but free training.

x.) An intern’s researching skills improve. For example, interns conduct building code research to find out the code requirements on the designing of stairs or bathrooms etc.

xi.) Most students receive salaries.

xii.) It improves disciplinary skills and practices. For example, projects have due dates and must be finished by the bidding due date or else another company would take it.

xiii.) It keeps students in school.

xiv.) It provides exposure to the professional practices. For example, students see how work is done in the real-world.
xv.) They learn about work standards/ethics.
xvi.) They can put real-world experiences on their CV.
xvii.) They improve communications and interactive relations skills.
xviii.) They can earn academic credit.

Case study

Participants

The case study highlighted in this paper involves 20 undergraduate architecture female students in their senior year. They are enrolled in the final semester to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Architecture. All students are required to enroll in an ARCH 557 Professional Practice course after finishing their internships. The author teaches this course. Also, he has been supervising internships for the last 4 years, and has had an opportunity to supervise a group of 20 students who were involved in the case study in the summer of 2012. Students took their internships locally within the KSA as well as abroad. As indicated in Figure 1, 11 students took internships in KSA, 2 in Egypt, 3 in Spain, and 1 of each in Germany, Italy, Dubai, and Jordan. Unfortunately, only a few students earned a stipend, out of 20.

During the class students were asked to answer 2 questions regarding internship experiences, to find out how the internships helped them in understanding the values of internships. Both questions are listed below:

Q1. What do you consider the best aspects of this experience?
Q2. What would you consider the weaker aspects of this experience?

The following answers of the above questions are quoted as received without modification from 13 randomly picked students'. Also, names have been changed for privacy reasons.

Mayyadah: The best aspect of this experience was how to contribute my knowledge into the real world perfectly as well as gaining the self-confidence by having the courage to say an opinion and discuss a problem to be solved. Moreover, visiting sites and see how the computer work is converted to real work on the other hand, the only weak aspect consider in my experience was the lack of interacting with clients, and it was a small environment to work in, it was a small office with a small number of architects.

Hauwa: The best aspect is to know the real work experience and understand how architecture works in the real experience. The weak aspect is that I still have to work harder myself and develop my skills to work.

Mohja: The best aspect of the experience is the type of the assigned work and the opportunity to work on a real life projects with real clients. Also, the knowledge and skills that were taught have been very beneficial to prepare to future career. The weaker aspect of this

Figure 1. Summer 2012 internship by countries.
experience was that the work place was not prepared to accommodate female workers.

**Nour:** The best aspect is the firms considerations of our applications and helping us grow by being showed in every aspect of the projects as well as providing educational seminars. The weaker aspect at the beginning long working hours then after discussed became very convenient.

**Fauziya:** The best aspects of this experience were learning how to deal with deadlines, team work and multi-tasking. The weaker aspects were not having enough time to learn more and work on more projects to gain more experience from the professionals.

**Ayah:** The aspect of this experience was getting face to face with real world projects as well as understanding and applying in-class knowledge in a practical setting. A weak point may be, no site visit and not getting to observe client meetings.

**Njood:** That I got the chance to experience the real world. As for the weaker aspect I still think that I need to work harder.

**Aliyah:** The strongest aspect was that I’ve seen and worked within a practical professional environment. I’ve experienced how things in an architectural firm actually occur. However, I think that if the internship was longer it would be better due to the fact that hasn’t covered all departments within my training.

**Noran:** This experience gives a chance to see the work in the real world; also, to learn new things, such as the law of building in the country. It was Jordan in my case. It was interesting and I learned how to become independent, strong and faster in work.

**Buthayna:** The best aspects: working with people of different background, open to criticism, different environment. The weaker aspect: some of the knowledge gain can’t be applicable in Saudi Arabia, and short period.

**Hind:** The best aspect of my experience was that I was exposed to many nationalities. Having to work in a multicultural environment is highly beneficial. However, the weakest point was that I wasn’t exposed to all the departments throughout my training period.

**Manal:** The best aspects of this experience are that they provided me the best knowledge and skills, also knowing different culture to see how other people think. The weaker aspect of this experiences just the communication, the people don’t know how to speak English very good but at the end it was fine.

**Esraa:** The best aspect is that I learn how is the real work of my major looks like, having a valuable experience to add in my CV when applying for a job after graduation. The worst aspect is the lack of explaining the needed requirements clearly from the university.

**Shatha:** The best aspect is that I got to clearly see and understand my excellent skills and the opportunity to enhance the skills I lack, where on the other hand I found it difficult to relate my theoretical studies to my work.

**Conclusion**

The smooth transition from school life to the real-world by working as an intern is essential and must be considered by students and institution administrators. Graduating without internships or related activities are missing learning processes every student should earn when they attend higher education institutions. Some valuable comments and suggestions were made by students on internship experiences. There are correlations between theories and internships (i.e. how to apply theory in the real-world) and both must be met prior to graduating. Internships are not a new concept and have been used since slavery in different forms. Almost, all of the countries in the world use some sort of internships (for which they may have different names) in their educational systems. Finally, this paper provides the students choices available for internships by providing thorough details of internship types, and length, and the best times to take them.

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**REFERENCES**


