Northern Illinois University

Factors Impacting Internship Success: Integration of Skills and Competencies into the Accountancy Curriculum

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Factors Impacting Internship Success: Integration of Skills and Competencies into the Accountancy Curriculum

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I wish to thank my family for their support and encouragement throughout my study.
Honors Capstone Abstract

There are a wide range of competencies that factor into a successful career in accountancy. I researched and summarized the competencies that are identified by various constituencies as contributing to career success and the importance of these competencies in the accounting profession. I mapped these competencies to the department of accountancy learning goals and objectives in recognition of how the department strives to align the curriculum with the factors that lead to student success. This spring, I was in the position to evaluate how well the accountancy curriculum prepared me for my internship and self-reflect on what skills or competencies I felt were gained through the internship experience itself. I realize that my personal experience may not reflect the experiences of other accountancy students. Therefore, under the guidance of Professors Smith and Cripe, I designed a study to survey accountancy students’ pre and post-internship to measure student preparedness for the internship, and skills / competencies gained during the internship. The overall research objective is to explore the influence of NIU’s accountancy department curriculum on internship success. From the data collected, students’ confidence level in the competencies outlined in this report increased during the internship as measured by a pre and post-internship survey. These finding are consistent with my personal experiences. I conclude with recommendations for improvement in the accountancy curriculum to aid future students in their internship performance.
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I. Overview and purpose of the study

My interest in this study stems from my desire to be successful in a career in accountancy. I recognize that there are a wide range of competencies that factor into career success and I also know that the department of accountancy strives to align its learning goals and objectives with the factors that lead to student success. When I began my discussions with Professors Smith and Cripe, I realized that I would be in the position to evaluate how well the accountancy curriculum prepared me for my internship and self-reflect on what skills or competencies I felt were gained through the internship experience itself. I also realize that my personal experience may not reflect the experiences of other accountancy students. Therefore, under the guidance of Professors Smith and Cripe, I designed a study to survey accountancy students’ pre and post-internship to measure student preparedness for the internship, and skills / competencies gained during the internship. The overall research objective is to explore the influence of NIU’s accountancy department learning objectives on internship success.

This research paper is organized as follows: First, I identify the competencies that are identified as contributing to career success and the importance of these competencies in the accounting profession. Next, I describe the accountancy department learning goals and objectives and how those learning objectives align with the desired competencies. I then describe my experiences in accounting courses throughout the undergraduate program including how the skills are taught, whether it is application based, absorbed in lecture, or through actively learning, such as participation in student organizations. I provide a self-reflective evaluation as to whether I feel the accountancy department equipped me with the knowledge and tools to be successful in my spring 2019 internship experience, including what I think was lacking prior to my internship. I will discuss my personal experience during my internship and how the hands-on learning experience filled any gaps I needed to be successful during the internship.

I then describe the research design where I surveyed students who also participated in a spring 2019 internship. I present the survey results including a measurement of personality factors that may contribute to internship success. I provide a preliminary assessment of the post-internship survey because as of the date of this paper, data collection is ongoing. Finally, based on this study, I will provide my perspective for improvements to the accountancy department curriculum to help prepare futures students for successful internships.
II. Competencies of success identified by the profession

The skills and competencies that contribute to success are well documented by various constituencies in the accounting profession. These constituencies include: the employers, the CPA professional organizations, the accounting accreditation leadership, and the accounting education organizations. A summary of the competencies and a basic definition of each are included in Appendix 1: Professional competencies. In total, these competencies equip accountancy students with the knowledge and skills needed to perform the tasks assigned to them, become a well-rounded professional, and succeed in their accountancy careers.

A. Importance of these competencies in the accountancy profession

The competencies are an important foundation for students entering the accountancy profession because they encompass a skillset that provides long-term value and contributes to career success. Each competency is important as evidenced by the consensus of the professions leading organizations the endorsement of the American Accounting Association (AAA) and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants’ (AICPA) joint report The Pathways Commission Report (AAA and AICPA, 2012). The following descriptions highlight the vital importance to these skills in the accountancy profession for newly graduated students entering the profession.

The AICPA highlights the importance of technical skills in accountancy graduates in its publication The Softer Side of CPA: “As a graduate from an accounting program, you’re simply expected to have a sufficient understanding of accounting principles and concepts” (AICPA, ThisWayToCPA, 2018). Although this competency seems very basic, it is vital to the success of an accountancy graduate to have a solid foundation in the accounting principles and concepts to have a successful career and be able to learn efficiently on the job.

While the accountancy profession places an emphasis on graduates needing sound technical accounting skills, soft skills are also ranked high. Communication skills from oral to written to listening are also immensely important to a newly graduated student entering the profession. What Big 4 Recruiters Are Really Looking For emphasized the importance of communication as a soft skill: “Accountants work in teams and communicate frequently with clients. They need to be able to give presentations, dispense advice and deliver news (sometimes bad news) in formal and informal settings” (UNC Kenan-Flagger Blog, 2018). While the previous quote from What Big 4 Recruiters Are Really Looking For focuses primarily on verbal
communication, written communication is also very important for newly graduated student’s because much of the accounting profession’s communication is in writing. *The Softer Side of CPA* emphasized how the accountancy profession at its core is a service industry from the interactions with clients, and on top of this, a CPA is required to write concise but compelling descriptions of the work performed (AICPA, ThisWayToCPA, 2018). Overall, communication is a soft skill that holds a large amount of importance to an accountant’s career success.

The newly hired accountancy graduate is not expected to know all answers; therefore, *research skills* are a critical skill of newly graduated accountancy students. The AICPA also lists research as an important technical competency and defined research’s importance as: “Identify, access and apply relevant professional frameworks, standards, and guidance, as well as other information for analysis and to make informed decisions” (AICPA, *Accounting Competencies*, 2018). Research skills help accountancy graduates work efficiently on the job by researching new clients or researching technical accounting issues that come up while completing a task.

Firms of all sizes look for newly graduated students to have *critical thinking and problem-solving skills.* *What Smaller Firms Expect from New Accounting Grads* also expanded on the importance of problem-solving skills by stating: “Problem-solving skills are a must-have for Roche, the Santa Rosa firm leader... ‘We are looking for the ability to think through a problem rather than having someone lead you to the answer,’ she said” (Ovaska-Few, 2017). Problem solving, and critical thinking skills are important for newly graduated accountancy students because not all problems are clearly identified and not all solutions are clear cut. In addition, critical thinking and problem solving are transferable to a wide array of tasks encountered as a professional. For example, an accountant applies problem-solving skills when creating an audit plan to list out details from procedures to cost of the services, or an accountant may use problem solving during analysis and decision making if conflict occurs within an audit team.

*Ethical behavior* is fundamental a trait. Although most firms did not explicitly state that ethical behavior is required, it is critical to the accountancy profession and to an individuals’ career progression. The AICPA’s *Professional Competencies* defined ethical conduct as a competency for the skills, attitudes, and behaviors or accounting professionals by stating: “Behave in manner bound by ethical principles for the protection of society, including upholding
the AICPA Code of Professional Conduct” (AICPA, 2018). The value of this competency truly defines the groundwork of the desired skills in newly graduated accountancy students entering the profession. *Competency Areas – An Introduction to Selection Criteria* stated: “We are looking for individuals who can analyze, distil and solve practical problems, generate new ideas and make sound judgements in complex situations. We also look for individuals who can demonstrate examples of motivating others towards a particular course of action” (Deloitte, 2018).

**Teamwork** in the accounting profession is important: “Building relationships is a big part of KPMG. Whichever area of our business you join, you’ll work as part of a team on a regular basis, so we’re looking for people who enjoy sharing and discussing ideas” (KPMG, 2018). Building on this, KPMG also emphasized that effective teamwork involves trying to get all members of the team involved for projects and not blaming others when you can help your team learn from mistakes instead. This competency is another crucial factor in the success of a newly graduated accountancy student since most of the work in this profession involves teamwork and inclusion to complete tasks. It is also important to learn how to adapt to working efficiently with new teams.

**Diversity awareness** is necessary for success in the profession. *Professional Competencies* expand on the importance of diversity awareness and working with others from diverse environments compared to your own when stated: “Work productively with diverse individuals in a variety of roles, with multiple interests in the outcome, to achieve acceptable and optimal results” (AICPA, 2018). Diversity awareness is important because firms need to know how new hires work in a diverse environment.

**Technology skills** are Microsoft Excel, databases, accounting software, and data visualization. *Technology Skills for the Accounting Student’s Toolbox* includes a quote from Eileen Taylor: “Students need to master Microsoft Excel, both because spreadsheets are widely used in accounting and also because it’s the foundation for working with more advanced software, said Eileen Taylor, a professor of accounting at North Carolina State University in Raleigh” (AICPA, ThisWayToCPA, 2018). Microsoft Excel skills are the basic building blocks for students entering an internship and the profession because the graduated will need to work with an array of accounting software. *What Large Firms Expect from New Accounting Grads* further discusses how new hires are expected to have a solid foundation in technology to learn
different accounting software by stating: “Most large firms have their associates use proprietary software, so new hires will have to master new programs regularly,” (Ovaska-Few, 2017). Firms place a strong emphasis on newly graduates to have strong technology skills to improve their versatility in learning new software programs they may utilize at the firm.

Firms are continuously interested in new hires having experience with data visualization. *Data Visualization Software: An Introduction to Tableau for CPAs* further discusses the importance of data visualization in the developing accountancy profession by stating: “In the 1980s, Excel was the new and unfamiliar software that provided CPAs with new ways of optimizing their services. Since that time, it has become a vital tool for auditors, tax professionals, and financial managers. As the pace of innovation continues to increase, professionals must remain conscious of the changing tools and capabilities around them. The authors believe data visualization software, including Tableau, is one such tool” (Eaton, 2018). Utilizing data visualization helps to portray large amounts of complex data into a visual, which makes the content easier to comprehend and explain in a time conscious method.

**Organization and time management** are essential skills for accountancy professional’s skillset. *Efficiency at Work: The Key to Having a Productive Day* indicates the importance of organization and time management by stating: “A very important thing to remember is that just because you are working hard all day, does not mean you are working well” (AICPA, ThisWayToCPA, 2018). A common theme across all sources is that firms are interested in seeing new hires that have previous work experience and participate in student organizations during their time on campus; this signals to firms that the student understands the importance of showing up on time and balancing their time between different responsibilities.

Accounting firms are interested in seeing in newly graduated students’ ability to **build relationships**. *Networking Skills* highlights the importance of networking by stating: “Providing our students with opportunities to hone this important skill prior to entering the workforce would enable them to become all of the more competitive in the classroom and, later, in their careers” (Geyer, 2014). In addition to this, networking is a crucial competency for students to develop during their time at school because networking skills can be the reason that students are hired at a firm. Building relationships with other professionals, professors, and students can offer new opportunities for newly graduated students.
Finally, *self-motivation* and taking the initiative to improve processes is important to the accountancy professional’s competencies. Firms are interested in seeing newly graduated accountancy students with an internal drive to accomplish tasks, improve processes, and make an impact in their position. *10 Competencies of top staff accountants* explains the importance and variety encompassed with self-motivation by stating: “Education is never complete, and top achievers take responsibility for their education by reading books and articles, watching videos, and listening to recordings on topics such as time management, writing skills, teamwork, presentation and communication skills, project management, judgement biases, supervising, management and leadership, and other personal improvement topics. They stay up to date on current accounting standards and interpretations, recognizing that the profession is constantly evolving” (Hohbein, 2017). Overall, self-motivation and improving processes encompasses many different components. This is a broad competency that has a variety of different meanings and takeaways as indicated above in *10 Competencies of Top Staff Accountants*.

III. Alignment of accountancy learning goals and objectives with competencies

From the research above, Dr. Cripe, Dr. Smith, and I summarized and defined the list of competencies employers desire of new hire accountancy students.\(^1\) These competencies are mapped to the Learning Goals (LGs) and Learning Objectives (LOs) of the department of accountancy’s curriculum, in Table 1.\(^2\) LGs are the desired outcomes from the accountancy curriculum; however, they are not measurable. LOs are used to measure students’ ability to demonstrate the specific knowledge or concepts taught in the curriculum. Together, these lead to the Learning Outcome, in which students can apply what they have learned. NIU Accountancy developed the LGs and LOs to capture the competencies desired by employers.

As demonstrated in Table 1, some of the competencies are not explicitly stated in a LO. However, at an aggregate level, these competencies are still covered within the accountancy curriculum at NIU.

\(^1\) See Appendix 1
\(^2\) A detailed description of the department’s LGs and LOs is included in Appendix 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Desired skills of an Accounting Graduate</th>
<th>2. Learning Objectives of NIU Department of Accountancy</th>
<th>Classes where either 1. or 2. were learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical skills</td>
<td>LO 1: Technical</td>
<td>206, 207, 310, 320, 331, 332, 360, and 450.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written</td>
<td>LO 5: Writing</td>
<td>206, 207, 331, 332, 360, 370, 375, 415, and 450.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>LO 6: Presentation</td>
<td>310, 370, 415, and 450.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research skills</td>
<td>LO 2: Problem solving / solution</td>
<td>331, 332, 360, 370, 375, 415, and 450.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving / critical thinking</td>
<td>LO 2: Problem solving / solution</td>
<td>206, 207, 310, 320, 331, 332, 360, 375, 415, and 450.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>LO 7: Codes of conduct</td>
<td>206, 207, 310, 320, 331, 332, 360, 370, and 450.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
<td>206, 207, 310, 331, 332, 360, 370, 375, 415, and 450.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td>206, 207, 310, 331, 332, 360, 370, 415, and 450.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excel</td>
<td>LO 3: Select data</td>
<td>207, 310, 320, 331, 332, 360, 415, and 450.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Databases</td>
<td>LO 4: Apply technology</td>
<td>207, 310, 320, 331, 332, 360, 415, and 450.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting software</td>
<td></td>
<td>310, 360, and 415.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data visualization</td>
<td></td>
<td>360 and 415.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization / time management</td>
<td></td>
<td>Every ACCY course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking / relationship building</td>
<td></td>
<td>360 and 370.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-motivation / taking initiative to improve processes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Every ACCY course.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. Personal reflection on competency integration in coursework

Through reflection on the accountancy courses I have taken, I have experienced each competency in at least one class. Based on my experiences in my courses, I will discuss all the competencies in Table 1 and explain how they were seen in different accountancy courses with applicable examples while mapping them to the department's LOs as well where applicable. I will include my experiences with student organizations and the Passport Program because many skills were obtained through these experiences.

Appendix 3 lists the required courses in the accountancy program along with the course abbreviation and description. This Appendix will aid those not familiar with the course abbreviations and content covered in each specific course.

A. Technical skills

Technical skills (LO 1) are the foundation of the accountancy courses offered at NIU, and students complete the core principles of accountancy in ACCY 206 and ACCY 207 along with all other students in the College of Business. While technical skills are a competency seen across most of the accountancy courses, the strongest examples of this competency are taught in ACCY 331, ACCY 332, ACCY 360, and ACCY 450. The assignments and projects in ACCY 331 and ACCY 332 give students the opportunity to apply the technical concepts, such as calculating cash or sales discounts and accounting for equity securities based on percentage of ownership. Assurance Services (ACCY 360) covers technical skills with auditing, assurance, and attest services. A minimum amount of lecturing occurs, whereas application-based activities dominate the class structure. For example, students apply lecture topics to hands-on activities, such as computing the tolerable misstatement amount and deciding if the client surpassed this amount. ACCY 450 allows students to apply different technical tax concepts. For example, while completing the Form 1040, students must decide whether to elect the standard or itemized deduction. To complete this, students need to understand how to calculate the itemized deduction, then know to take the larger one between the two deduction amounts. With the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, students also learned about the qualifications, application, and computation of the Section 199A Qualified Business Income Deduction.
B. Communication

Written communication (LO 5) helps students learn to communicate their technical skills by writing with clarity and appropriate grammar. This competency appears in ACCY 360, ACCY 375, and ACCY 450. With ACCY 360, students practice written communication by submitting outlines for each chapter, answering essay questions on exams, and writing conceptual responses for in class activities. The Accountancy Writing Lab (ACCY 375) focuses on written communication, and student advance their writing skills through homework assignments and projects. Students complete a memo and email project to practice profession writing. In the memo, students communicate technical concepts to their client about 501(c)3’s, which are non-profit organizations. With the email project, students address a problem email thread to several different people. Finally, in ACCY 450, students write a memo for a client to explain the tax returns they compiled. Students also write an email to a client to inquire additional information to complete one of the projects.

Oral communication (LO 6) helps students learn to communicate their technical skills in addition to written communication by delivering professional and effective presentations. This competency is seen in ACCY 310, ACCY 415, and ACCY 450. In ACCY 310, students run different queries in Microsoft Access from data about employees’ commission during a quarter. Afterwards, students present their findings to the class with a supplemental presentation. Next, oral communication skills are taught in ACCY 415 since students are broken into randomized groups then assigned a topic to deliver an impromptu presentation. It is vital for students to work effectively in their randomized groups to effectively deliver a professional, cohesive presentation. At the end of class, each group delivers the presentation on their assigned topic to teach the other students. Finally, students practice oral communication in ACCY 450 during group presentations. Groups receive a topic, teach themselves about it, and then explain the concept to the remainder of the class.

Listening is developed in ACCY 320, ACCY 331, and ACCY 332. While listening is not explicitly outlined in the Department’s LOs, students develop this competency throughout the accountancy courses. Intermediate Cost Management (ACCY 320) involves listening since students follow along with lecture. Most of the calculations while working through a problem are verbal and not physically written down. Listening is also seen in ACCY 331 because students need to actively listen to lecture to comprehend the concepts taught. For example,
students are introduced to several different depreciation methods, such as double declining, instead of only straight line. To understand the difference between these different methods and how to calculate them, listening is vital during lecture. Finally, ACCY 332 includes active listening in lecture. For example, students listen about calculating a pension worksheet if the employer offered a defined-benefit plan.

C. Research skills

Students practice research skills (LO 2) primarily in ACCY 332, ACCY 375, and ACCY 415 by identifying problems and considering alternative solutions. Project 1 in ACCY 332 requires students to research Blue Apron to learn about this company prior to starting an accountancy work. Project 2 in ACCY 332 asks students to search FASB codifications to support their written responses. Project 2 also requires students to research the differences between the indirect and direct method for cash flows then decide which method to use. The memo project in ACCY 375 assigns students to individually learn about 501(c)3 entities to understand the different components of the non-profit company the assignment involved. Lastly, the group project in ACCY 415 asks students to identify a problem and propose a solution to the issue. My group noticed a large amount of null values in a city of Chicago dataset, so we sorted through this data. We found it to be an issue that the city had so many null values that did not indicate where and how the money was being spent with certain contracts.

D. Problem solving and critical thinking

Problem solving and critical thinking (LO 2) are developed in ACCY 310, ACCY 320, and ACCY 415 by identifying problems and considering alternative solutions. In ACCY 310, students are given a set of activities performed by the same individual then are asked which series violates segregation of duties and why. This provides students the opportunity to identify a problem and correct it by separating these duties. ACCY 320 allows students to compute internal decision-making calculations to identify problems, such as if a department is overspending on a certain raw material in a product. Finally, we practice problem solving and critical thinking in ACCY 415, Data Analytics in Accounting, with in class activities and group projects. Students make analyses based off the data analysis completed in Microsoft Excel, such as histograms, descriptive statistics, and correlations.
E. Ethics

Ethics (LO 7) is seen in ACCY 206, ACCY 320, and ACCY 370 by students learning how to articulate relevant codes of conduct and professional standards. ACCY 206 introduces the importance of ethics in the accountancy curriculum. One component of this class focuses on the Sarbanes-Oxley Act and the effect this has on ethics in the accountancy profession, such as a more transparent process for financial reporting and the CEO and CFO holding more responsibility for the accuracy of the financial statements. ACCY 320 addresses ethics too. We learned the importance of ethics and integrity when there is motivation for personal gain. For example, an employee might misrepresent sales forecasts so that when the sales are higher than expected, their bonus would increase. Representing lower budgeted amounts than what is projected for is called “sandbagging” the forecast. Teaching students about potentially facing these situations prepares us on how to address these situations if they occur, such as discussing the issue with upper management to penalize the behavior. Finally, ACCY 370 covers ethics with the BELIEF presentation, which standards for “Building ethical leadings with an integrated ethics framework”. During this presentation, students learned about how to apply the ethical values instilled in them to situations one may face in the profession, such as having increased awareness for situations involving unethical decisions. Students each received a BELIEF Decision-making Card to keep with during their education at NIU and for their future careers as well.3

F. Teamwork

Teamwork is deployed with ACCY 207, ACCY 332, and ACCY 415. While teamwork is not explicitly indicated in the Department’s LOs, learning to work effectively with teams is seen in many of the accountancy courses. Working effectively in teams is an invaluable skill newly graduated students need because a bulk of accountancy positions are heavily dominated in group work, such as tax and audit teams at a public accounting firm. There are group quizzes in ACCY 207, which give us the opportunity to work together to reach the correct solution. We complete “opportunities” (group quizzes for extra credit), computational problems, and group projects to learn teamwork in ACCY 332. ACCY 415 has a semester-long group project. This project helps

3 See Appendix 3
us practice essential components of teamwork, such as communication, cohesion, and listening. To be successful in this project, learning to work together as a group by handling conflict and dividing up work is necessary.

G. Diversity awareness

Diversity awareness is not outlined in one of the Department’s LOs; however, it is a crucial competency that correlates with effective teamwork as well. ACCY 370 includes diversity awareness since we interact with other students in our class from diverse backgrounds. Diversity awareness also relates to the internship applications since students apply to a variety of firms with diverse backgrounds, a diverse employer base, and different cultures at each firm. Group projects in ACCY 360 and ACCY 450 allow students to learn to effectively work with diverse, new groups. ACCY 360 emphasizes the importance of learning to adapt to working with new audit teams on different client engagements. Every class meeting includes a component of teamwork, and the purpose is to help students learn how to work with other students they are not familiar with. Finally, ACCY 450’s group work helps students interact with diversity. Students are paired with students they are not familiar with so that they learn how to interact and work cohesively with new group partners instead of their friends.

H. Technology skills

Technology skills are a broad competency in the accountancy profession involving Microsoft Excel (LO 3), databases (LO 4), accounting software, and data visualization. From technology skills, students learn to select the data and methodology needed to make decisions all while also applying appropriate technology.

One competency for technology skills includes utilizing Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Excel is in ACCY 320, ACCY 331, and ACCY 415. For ACCY 320, students use Microsoft Excel during lecture to complete computations, and students also complete the MOS Microsoft Excel Specialist Exam 77-727. For Project 1 in ACCY 331, students work with an adjusted trial balance in Microsoft Excel to compile financial statements and close the corresponding books. Finally, students also take the MOS Excel Expert Exam 77-728 in ACCY 415.

Another competency for technology skills are databases, such as Microsoft Access. Utilizing Microsoft Access is seen in ACCY 310 and ACCY 415. For ACCY 310, we complete homework assignments and group projects in Microsoft Access with a dataset. Students also
further apply different technology skills in ACCY 310 by deciding between using Microsoft Excel or Microsoft Access. For example, students decide to use Microsoft Excel to calculate the net present value while they use Microsoft Access to store information about thousands of customers. We also work with datasets in Microsoft Access while in ACCY 415. During ACCY 415, we also complete the MOS Microsoft Access Specialist Exam 77-730.

Although accounting software is the next component of the technology skill’s competency, this part is not seen in the curriculum. This is a component that students learn during their internship experience. Data visualization is in ACCY 415. Students learn to use Tableau to practice creating data visualizations. A challenging part to data visualizations is learning to make effective visualizations, such as ones that are easy for the viewer to read. For example, students create visualization in ACCY 415 of a map of the United States to illustrate where the most sales occur for a company. This illustration can be a surface level indicating states or more specific to highlight top cities.

I. Organization and time management

Students learn organization and time management during the accountancy program. While organization and time management are another set of competencies not strictly included in the Department’s LOs, these competencies help develop students into well-rounded individuals who can handle the rigorous coursework and schedule administered by the Department of Accountancy. The strongest example of students learning effective organization and time management involves the first semester in the accountancy program. During this semester, students are enrolled in ACCY 310, ACCY 331, and ACCY 370 with other non-accountancy courses. Between these three courses, students have many overlapping deadlines, which requires excellent organization and time management skills to be successful. Students balance homework, SUA submissions, exams, and the recruiting process for internships.

J. Networking and relationship building

Although networking and relationship building are not highlighted in the Department’s LOs, these competencies are vital for students to start developing business relationships, such as interacting with professionals at different firms to secure an internship position. Networking and relationship building are competencies experienced in ACCY 360 and ACCY 370. During ACCY 360, guest speakers come to class to deliver presentations. This gives students the
opportunity to interact, ask questions, and make an impression on these guest speakers. With ACCY 370, students participate in several activities to learn networking and relationship building. Students have a mock interview with a representative from an accounting firm, guest speakers in class, and attend the career fair.

K. Self-motivation and taking initiative to improve processes

The last competency in the curriculum is self-motivation. Self-motivation is also considered taking initiative to improve the process. While self-motivation and taking the initiative to improve processes are not indicated in the Department's LOs either, students further develop these competencies at an aggregate level from the Department's courses. Self-motivation is fundamental in technical accountancy courses, such as ACCY 331, ACCY 332, and ACCY 450. During these courses, students must motivate themselves to read course material before and after lecture, take notes, complete homework assignments, and study for exams. If students want to learn the material, self-motivation is a main component to successful completion of this.

L. Competencies outside of the classroom at NIU

Although most of the competencies are covered across the variety of required accountancy courses, diversity awareness and networking are not taught heavily in the curriculum. Even though this may be lacking from classroom experience in lecture content, students are exposed to these competencies daily outside of the classroom environment. I have practiced my networking skills and expanded my diversity awareness from attending professional events on campus and participating in student organizations. Furthermore, I have also learnt more about diversity awareness from the Passport Program.

Accountancy students are required to attend the Accountancy Career Fair while enrolled in ACCY 370. The purpose of this is to help accountancy students interact and network with accountancy firms looking to hire students for internship positions and fulltime positions. The career fair is a beneficial experience where students can apply and build on their networking skills in a professional environment. From here, students are then hopefully invited to on campus and office interview, which further expands the opportunities to work on networking skills. Professors can discuss how to improve networking skills during lecture; however, students physically interacting with professionals from different firms offers the best way to develop
networking skills. It is most beneficial to develop networking skills outside of the classroom environment.

I am a lifelong member in Beta Alpha Psi (BAP), the accountancy honor society on campus. Through this organization, I practice my networking skills and expose myself to different forms of diversity awareness. I am in constant contact with meeting different students on campus from different grades levels, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, religions, and more. I am also exposed to a different firm on a weekly basis when that firm comes to campus to deliver a presentation to the BAP students. Because of this, I have the opportunity to learn to network and interact with professionals. This is a great opportunity to see what specific culture fits not only myself, but I am sure other students also experience this as well by getting to interact with different firms on campus. It is helpful being able to interact with a variety of firms to see what firm one potentially sees themselves at, while also being open minded to the other firms recruiting on campus and learning how to effectively interact with their professionals.

Aside from BAP, I also participate in several other student organizations on campus that are outside of the College of Business. These organizations include Alpha Phi Omega (APO), Lambda Sigma Sophomore Honor Society, and Mortar Board Senior Honor Society. Because of these organizations, I can interact with students of different age levels, majors, cultures, backgrounds, etc. that are different from my own or what I am accustomed to.

The Passport Program in the College of Business is another great way to experience diversity awareness on campus. Leadership events for the Passport Program typically focus on learning how to embrace diversity in leadership in others and yourself. Most of the events I have attended on campus pertain to leadership workshops. Holding an executive board position in student organizations can also help with this experience. Next, the ethics events for the Passport Program typically involve events that touch on diversity awareness in some aspect. Some of the events I have attended relating to this include: diversity dialogues, common reading experience lectures, a lecture by Dr. McCoy, and a HEAT event that invited NIU’s Ethics Officer as a guest speaker. The service events are a great way to experience diversity in the types of projects that are completed and who these projects benefit as well. For service events, I have attended: sophomore days of service, NIU Cares Day, BAP tutoring, cards for hospitalized kids, and BDO’s service event at the Pay It Forward House. Next, the global events also bring diversity awareness to students’ attention. These events help students embrace and practice maintaining a
global perspective. There are remarkable discussion points and conversations held during these events as well, and some of these topics cover diversity awareness, such as the Women’s Entrepreneurship Panel. Finally, experiential learning is another fundamental part of the Passport Program for diversity awareness. This section gives a twist to the Passport events since it is focusing on learning by gaining a hands-on experience. One of the events I attended for experiential learning was a common reading experience lecture for Bryan Stevenson regarding American injustice, mercy, humanity, and making a difference.

V. Internship Experiences

Throughout my internship, I experienced all the competencies and LOs. Based on my overall experience, I discuss all the competencies below that are defined in Table 1 and LOs included in Table 4. I provide examples of scenarios I encountered that include these competencies and applicable LOs.

I experienced **technical skills** (LO 1) during my internship while completing work papers every day since these skills are the foundation to the internship experience for interns to perform at the expected level of the firm. Interns continuously build on their knowledge of technical accountancy concepts throughout the duration of the internship experience. While interns are not expected to know everything going into their internship, such as auditing testing procedures, they are expected to have a foundation in technical concepts from the accountancy courses they took prior to starting the internship. During my internship, I further experienced this LO while building on my understanding of work papers. As my internship progressed, I developed a better understanding of how to complete the testing procedures and the purpose behind this testing. Once these different components clicked for me, I saw how the technical accountancy skills learned in the classroom paralleled to my internship experience. By applying ACCY 332 concepts in a work paper, I deciphered between operating and capital leases. Competing this work paper was challenging with the new leasing standards.

I used **written communication** (LO 5) heavily throughout my day during my internship. Writing with clarity and appropriate grammar is an important key concept in auditing, such as documenting procedures and explaining the results from testing performed. When I completed testing work papers, I added textboxes on each tab that indicated the purpose, procedure, results, and related tick marks. I expressed the content in these text boxes with clarity and conciseness.
In addition to these textboxes, I also demonstrated my written communication in emails. Throughout my work day, I sent emails to coworkers, clients, and third parties for AR confirmation purposes. Next, I also exemplified my written communication while writing completion work papers, such as the management representation letter. The written communication skills I learned in ACCY 375, such as clarity and conciseness in business writing, were put to great use in these scenarios.

**Oral communication** (LO 6) is the next competency I used to have a successful experience at my internship. While I never formally delivered any form of presentation, this related to verbal communication, which was commonly used throughout my day at my internship. As an auditor, client interaction is arguably one of the most important parts of an auditor’s work. Even as an intern, I spoke directly to my clients, such as staff accountants, controllers, and CEOs, regarding my questions and concerns. While speaking to clients, I needed to clearly communicate my questions or requests for additional information for testing purposes. In addition to speaking with my clients, I also needed to speak with my audit teams as well. For communication within my audit team setting, I needed to communicate clearly if I had a difficult time understanding the testing procedures or even explaining the testing procedure I performed to different members on my teams. For example, I explained the testing performed in one of my work papers to a recently promoted partner, and it was crucial I was able to deliver a professional and effective explanation of my testing performed.

Although this competency is not explicitly included in the LOs, I also used **listening**. I utilized active listening while an in-charge or manager explained the testing procedure in a work paper to me. I also applied listening while speaking with my clients. Several times a day, I inquired with my client about additional information to finish a work paper. During these conversations, I asked follow up questions. I listened to my client’s explanation with my undivided attention, so that I could implement this into a textbox in my work paper as documentation or relay the conversation to my in-charge.

**Research skills** (LO 2) were utilized during my internship. As an intern, one is not expected to know everything. However, interns are assigned work papers that first-year staff usually complete. To complete these with the best effort, one may have to perform research to obtain a better understanding of the accounts or even external factors that may impact a client. For example, one client I experienced specialized in the boating industry by providing services to
the public, such dinner cruises on Lake Michigan and the Chicago River. While completing an income statement flux analysis, an account concerning the client’s diesel expenses increased significantly compared to the prior year. To obtain a better understanding with this account fluctuation, I researched the trend of diesel prices throughout the year. From this, I learned that there were months were the average cost of diesel was much higher than historical pricing. I learned researching skills similar to this while completing projects in ACCY 331 and ACCY 332.

I implemented problem solving and critical thinking skills (LO 2) during my internship as well. I identified problems and considered alternative solutions in a variety of situations during the audits I worked on. First, I considered different solutions on how to properly test an account, for example. Building on this, during testing, I might discover an account balance outside of expectations compared to the prior year, and in these instances, I had to identify problems and consider alternative solutions. If an account fell outside of expectations, I could follow up with management regarding the account balance change, test the account balance further, or perform outside research to grasp a better understanding on the account. For example, an account balance may have experienced a larger change due to factors impacting the client’s industry overall. It is important for an intern to start practicing an analytical mindset and being skeptical of the client’s financial information presented. Having a skeptical mindset was often discussed in ACCY 360, but it is a competency that is truly learned with the hands-on experience of an internship. Finally, problems were also identified while completing the audit and deficiencies were identified. For example, one client I worked on did not have an internal control where another employee approved the controller’s entries, so this was noted as a significant deficiency.

Ethics (LO 7) is another competency that I experienced while my internship with articulating relevant codes of conduct and professional standards during an audit. The course of the audit and internal conversations within the firm covered this competency. One example of a work paper I completed during the audit, grounded in ethics, involved inquiries of others. Essentially, this work paper required me to inquire with several people at the client, such as the controller, CFO, and staff accountant. I would go around the office and inquire with the identified individuals about fraud within the company. The questions consisted of: if one was asked to perform any unusual accounting functions or procedures and if one was aware of any
fraud within the firm. Regarding the employees at the accounting firm I interned at, the auditors discussed “eating time” during the busy season kick-off meeting. ACCY 360 covered the topic of “eating time” as well, and students learned how to approach this conversation, such as one being transparent with management if a task took longer than expected. Recording less time than one actually worked or being asked to record less time than actually performed is an unethical practice that is unfortunately not unheard of within the accounting profession. The partners at this accounting firm emphasized the importance of not eating time since accurate time logs help the firm build the budget for the following year’s audit.

**Teamwork** is the next competency from my internship even though it is not seen in the LOs. As an auditor, every day is spent with the audit team one is working with that week. Almost every week during my internship, I worked with an entirely new team and constantly met new coworkers. Part of a successful audit internship is learning to work effectively in audit teams. It was not uncommon for a client to not be ready for the auditor’s arrival, so certain work papers were pushed back because of this. During situations like this, audit teams need to work together as a unified group with open communication. Efficient teams express open dialogue if they were behind and needed someone on the team to pick up a work paper from their work load. From this learning experience, I picked up work papers from a first- or second-year staff, so I worked on some testing procedures I may not have otherwise seen as an intern.

**Diversity awareness** is another competency interns experience that is not covered in the LOs. Auditing is heavily focused on interactions whether these are within one’s audit team or with the client. Because of this, one must be prepared to work with others. It is important to be open to the differences, opinions, and backgrounds of those one interacts with during work. Embracing diversity awareness is a key component for a successful internship opportunity. For example, one is not always going to have similarities with the client due to differences ranging from education level, amount of work experience, and age. Despite these differences, one needs to form a bond with their client to leave a positive impression on the client instead of a negative one commonly associated with auditors.

A variety of **technology skills** are present throughout the course of the internship. I experienced Microsoft Excel (LO 3), databases (LO 4), accounting software, and data visualization during my internship experiences. I primarily used Excel for a bulk of my work. I applied skills that I learned from my coursework since it was required for students to complete
the MOS Excel Specialist in ACCY 320 and MOS Excel Expert exam in ACCY 415. Because of this training, I was proficient with a variety of Excel’s features, such as nested functions, shortcuts, and conditional formatting. These all made completing work papers incredibly efficient. For example, I used a VLOOKUP to complete lead sheets instead of hard coding my numbers and possibly involving human error in retyping out these values. I also selected data and a methodology to make decisions. For example, with accounts receivable, accounts payable, and cash reconciliations, I made selections based off the aging listings provided by the clients. These selections are used to test completeness for accounts receivable and the search for unrecorded liabilities with accounts payable. While testing cash, some selections might relate to wires or checks in January that were over scope. The importance of this LO related to if the selections provided assurance that amounts were properly recorded, included, or excluded. I did not experience much accounting software during my internship. I only experienced CaseWare. CaseWare includes a client’s trial balance information, and one picks from a variety of trial balance formatting options. For example, one client I worked on owned a variety of golf courses. Some work papers only pertained to one specific course within that company, so it was helpful to pull a trial balance from CaseWare that only pulled accounts related to that entity. Finally, I applied data visualization as well. In work papers, such as revenue analytics, I illustrated the historic change of revenue with a table in Excel.

**Organization and time management skills** were also covered during my internship even though these competencies are not stated in the LOs. Being timely in the completion of work papers was an important part of an internship. It was important to complete work papers in a timely manner and being self-aware of when I could complete a work paper by. I needed to express awareness of my time management skills to not over promise quick deadlines. In addition to this, organization skills were important during an audit. As an intern, I was not expected to know everything, so questions about work papers, testing procedures, and clients were not uncommon. However, other members on the audit team are not always readily available to answer my questions at that exact moment. Here, it is important for an intern to be organized and keep a log of questions to ask or even a to-do list that indicates high priority items.

**Networking and relationship building** are the next competency experienced as well during the internship experience despite not being include in the LOs. As an audit intern, I needed to establish a foundation with my clients. When I went into client’s offices to inquire
about something I came across during my testing, I would also try to have some small talk with them to learn more about them on a personal level. This would help build a friendly, working relationship with my client, and this helped them to be more cordial towards me. Networking and relationship building were also useful with coworkers and other employees at the firm I do not know personally. For example, while writing my research report for ACCY 473, I needed to discuss my topic with someone at the firm to get a professional perspective on the current development. Since I picked the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, immediate members on my audit team were not incredibly familiar with the act and its direct implications. I spoke to my career coach and she put me in contact with one of her friends in the tax department. Without networking and relationship building, I may not have met this tax contact within the firm.

Lastly, self-motivation and taking the initiative to improve processes is another competency experienced although not covered in the LOs. While completing my assigned work papers during my internship, I often ran out of work during the week. During these circumstances, I needed self-motivation to ask for new, more challenging work papers. In addition to this, I also tried to improve processes where there was opportunity to do so. With some of the work papers, prior year formatting sometimes was messy or difficult to follow. Here, I would spend extra time cleaning up the work papers to make the format more efficient, cleaner, and applied formulas.

A. Competencies gained on internship alone

During my internship experience, I expanded on some of the competencies desired by employers that I previously learned in the classroom. I built on these competencies and made them stronger from my internship experience since I was able to experience more real-world scenarios in comparison to the classroom.

My technical accountancy skills improved immensely during the few months I had my internship. For the first time, I experienced working with foreign currencies. I never encountered any situations in lecture or homework in the NIU curriculum where I was asked to convert foreign currencies, reconcile foreign currencies, or translate any accounts in another language. Completing these tasks relating to foreign currencies was not too challenging once I worked through these types of work papers a few times, but it was something I would have felt more confident in my work if I was exposed to this in the accountancy curriculum prior to my internship experience.
I also experienced applying testing procedures and analytics used during an audit while on my internship. While the concept of testing procedures is covered in the auditing course in the accountancy curriculum, students never completed any case studies where they applied these testing procedures. During my internship, I was thrown into these different testing procedures and analytics my first day at a client.

Building on the work completed at my clients, learning how to effectively interact with clients was another experience learned solely at my internship where I built on all three of my communication competencies. It was important for me to build my verbal communication with how I carried myself in a conversation with a client. In these conversations, active listening was required as well. I needed to absorb what my client was telling me and be able to respond to their comments with follow up questions. I also utilized written communication to my clients in emails. My communication with clients was predominately in person since we completed fieldwork at the client’s office; however, sometimes someone at the client would work remotely.

B. Transition to study

To this point, this paper has discussed my personal experiences. I have discussed where I thought the desired competencies were covered in the department’s coursework and how the I.Gs and LOs were supported by the curriculum. I also shared my personal experiences during my internship, such as what competencies I expanded on during my internship and what skills I learned solely from my internship experience.

While I am excited to share my internship experience, I recognize that other students may not have had the same experience. Therefore, the study discussed in the remainder of this paper takes into consideration the internship experience for the other 65 students who completed a spring 2019 internship. Under the guidance of Professors Cripe and Smith, I created a pre and post-internship survey, to learn more about the other interns’ competencies, confidence in their competencies, and their satisfaction in the internship experience.

From the data gathered from these surveys, I compare my own personal experience to the average student’s experience and discuss the similarities and differences in my experience versus other student interns.
VI. Research Design

Prior to drafting the pre and post-internship surveys, I went through the process of becoming Institutional Review Board (IRB) certified. I completed the CITI Program course for Social & Behavioral Research for the curriculum group and course learner group during June 2018.

The respondents in this study are 65 accountancy students with a spring 2019 internship. From these two surveys, I analyzed the results and to help inform the development of the accountancy department curriculum, including integration of competencies into course content.

The purpose of my research project is to explore the impact of students’ experiences in the NIU accountancy curriculum with internship success. Since an individual’s personality can also impact their internship success, I also measured student’s personality as an influencing variable. An overview of the research design is presented in Appendix 5. The overall research objective is: To explore the influence of NIU’s accountancy department learning objectives on internship success.

Discussions with Professors Cripe and Smith helped me realize that I cannot measure internship success in this limited study. So, we asked students to rate their satisfaction with the internship experience and if they received a job offer. Although this does not independently measure success, we feel that the independent measures of pre and post-internship competencies and confidence in those competencies provides insight on student preparedness. Arguably, student preparedness will lead to career success.

The research questions stated in the null form are:

Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between student scores on accountancy learning objectives and internship satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: There is no relationship between personality measures and internship satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: There is no change in student scores on accountancy learning objectives pre- and post-internship.

Hypothesis 4: There is no change in student confidence in their scores pre- and post-internship.
Hypothesis 5: There is no change in student self-evaluation of competencies pre-and post-internship.

A. Survey development

The pre-survey has four sections of questions: demographics, competencies, IPIP personality assessment, and accountancy questions to measure learning objectives. The demographics section is designed to gather general information about the survey respondents, such as gender, age, and prior work experience. The competencies section asks respondents to rank their confidence in those competencies prior to their spring 2019 internship. These competencies were identified at the beginning of this paper. Respondents completed the IPIP personality assessment, which measures level of extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience.\(^4\) Lastly, the respondents respond to a series of accountancy questions, and after each accountancy question, they are asked to rank their confidence in their answer.\(^5\) There are two accountancy questions for each LO. This part of the survey took the most time to develop due to many revisions.

The post-internship survey has the same format as the pre-internship survey, except the IPIP personality assessment section is omitted since overall personality is not likely to change within a few months. The objective of the post-survey is to measure how respondents’ confidence in their own competencies and ability to correctly and confidently answer accountancy questions changed from their internship experience.

The two surveys, IRB application, and the consent form were submitted to the IRB on October 1, 2018. The application was approved by the IRB on October 4, 2018, the protocol number is HS18-0259, and is valid until October 3, 2019.

Once the pre and post-internship surveys were approved by the IRB, I piloted the survey on three accountancy student volunteers not participating in a spring 2019 internship. The pilot of the survey took place on October 31, 2018 under the guidance of Dr. Smith and Dr. Cripe. The purpose of piloting the survey was to ensure there was no unintended meanings or lack of clarity throughout the content of the surveys. Dr. Smith, Dr. Cripe, and I held a meeting to debrief the students once they completed the two surveys. The students were asked to share their questions,

\(^4\) The International Personality Item Pool Representation (IPIP) personality test is well known test to determine personality traits. This is a free-use questionnaire and results can be compared to the general population.

\(^5\) See Appendix 6 for a copy of the accountancy questions.
comments, concerns, and feedback regarding the survey format. Most of the feedback revolved around clarity for the introductory questions. Wording changes were made for clarity. The pilot students were also asked if there were any questions on either survey that were distracting or made them uncomfortable to answer. All three students confirmed that no question was distracting or made them feel uncomfortable to answer. After the minor revisions the final version was prepared and ready to be administered to the spring 2019 interns.

VII. Pre-Internship

A. Survey administration

Students with a spring 2019 internship are required to attend one of the three informational session in fall 2018. The pre-internship survey was administered at all three internship orientation meetings. The dates and times for these information sessions included:

- Tuesday, November 6th 9:30 – 10:30 a.m.
- Tuesday, November 6th 4:00 – 5:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, November 7th 4:00 – 5:00 p.m.

After the internship orientation activities occurred, Dr. Pam Smith read a statement inviting students to participate in the study. If a student agreed to participate in the study, a consent form was distributed to read and sign. Those students who agreed to participate were give the survey URL. Since we were in a computer lab, the students then worked through the survey, and once they finished, a copy of the consent form was distributed for their records. We had sixty-five students participate in the pre-internship survey.

B. Demographics

From the pre-internship survey, the demographic questions were summarized. Table 2 presents the respondents demographics.
### Table 2
**Respondent Demographic Information (n = 65)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 includes a count of the different internship types the respondents had in spring 2019. Most of the respondents are in an external audit or tax internship, but there are a variety of other categories. Table 3 also contains a breakdown on what type of firm that will host the intern. The most popular firm category is multinational CPA firm.

### Table 3
**Respondent Accountancy Related Information (n = 65)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internship Category</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External audit</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External audit and tax</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal audit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External audit and internal audit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External audit, internal audit, and tax</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal audit, tax, financial reporting, and other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accountancy firm</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big 4 CPA firm (e.g., PwC, EY, KPMG, Deloitte)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multinational CPA firm (e.g., BDO, RSM, Grant Thornton)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large national CPA firm (e.g., Plante Moran, Crowe)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small regional CPA firm (e.g., BKD, Wipfli)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small local CPA firm (e.g., Mowery &amp; Schoenfield, Miller Cooper)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporation - Fortune 500 (e.g., Caterpillar, John Deere)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporation - Non-Fortune 500 (e.g., CAN Insurance, Middleby)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private company (e.g., Medline, Uline)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 presents prior work experience and if their spring 2019 internship is their first internship. Most of the respondents will be having their first internship in spring 2019.
Respondents also provided the number of years of work experience prior to the internship. More than half of respondents indicated that they had over four years of prior work experience. Table 4 presents the main types of work experience. The most popular types of work experience were food service, retail, and some form of accounting, financial, or banking experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Internship</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Prior Work Experience</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 years</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food service</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting / Financial / Banking</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary / Admin / Clerical</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscaping</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifeguard / Swim Instructor / Camp Counselor</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Investigator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply Chain</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production and Technology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness Training</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab Aide</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental-library</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. Personality assessment

Table 5 includes the data from the IPIP personality assessment. The table includes the average scores from the respondents and the average score from 10,000 respondents in the IPIP assessment in the public domain. The rank order of the personality measures is very similar. Both groups had openness to experience as the lowest score. The internship respondents had extroversion as the highest score whereas the IPIP respondents had conscientiousness as their highest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Average from Student Interns</th>
<th>Average from IPIP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extroversion</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to Experience</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VIII. Post-Internship

A. Survey administration

If students with an internship want academic credit for the internship, they are required to take Academic Internship Program (ACCY 473). Part of the course requirement is for student to give an oral presentation on their internship experience once the internship is complete. If the student consented to participate in the pre-internship survey, they were asked to complete the post-internship survey after their oral presentation. Students that complete both the pre and post-internship survey were compensated with a monetary reward. This monetary reward is intended to increase the likelihood of students completing both surveys. Without both the pre and post-internship survey data, an analysis of students' growth cannot be measured.

To complete an analysis of the data in time to submit the independent study to the Honors College, the data pool was cutoff on Tuesday, April 23, 2019. At this time, 37 students, who completed the pre-internship survey, participated in the post-internship survey. Data will continue to be collected until Tuesday, May 7, 2019; however, this data is not included in this report.
As part of my independent study, I attended every intern presentation to administer the post-internship survey. This provided me with unique insights to the experiences of other interns. By the end of the semester, I will have attended 23 presentation sessions which ranged anywhere from two to four presentations. These observations allowed me to obtain a richer insight on the intern's experiences and how these aligned or did not align to my own experience.

B. Results

Data from the pre and post survey were run using SPSS statistical package. I was aided by Professor Cripe in this task. He ran T-tests and Wilcoxon and signed-rank tests on the data to measure difference in the student scores. For those questions in which the student rated their confidence in their competencies or their answer to the accounting questions, the confidence was scored as: very confident = 2, confident = 1, unconfident = -1, and very unconfident = -2.

1. Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between student scores on accountancy learning objectives and internship satisfaction. (SCORE_DIF – POST SATISFACTION)

Hypothesis 2: There is no relationship between personality measures and internship satisfaction. (CON_DIF – POST SATISFACTION)

There was no significance found for Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 as illustrated in Table 6. This result stems from the fact that almost all students stated they were highly satisfied with the internship experience. Because there was no variation in the satisfaction, the statistical measure cannot discern a difference in the student scores pre and post internship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6</th>
<th>Hypothesis 1 and 2 Results*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hypothesis 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CON_DIF - POST SATISFACTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)d</td>
<td>0.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Variable defined as the overall change in confidence in answers on examination of learning objectives (pre - post internship) and a measure of internship satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Variable defined as the overall change in score on examination of learning objectives (pre - post internship) and a measure of internship satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. p&lt;.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 (continued) Hypothesis 1 and 2 Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis 2</th>
<th>Hypothesis 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CON_DIF - POST_SATISFACTION</td>
<td>SCORE_DIF - POST_SATISFACTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-1.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Sign Test  
b. Variable defined as the overall change in confidence in answers on examination of learning objectives (pre-post internship) and a measure of internship satisfaction  
c. Variable defined as the overall change in score on examination of learning objectives (pre-post internship) and a measure of internship satisfaction  
d. p<.05

2. Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3: There is no change in student scores on accountancy learning objectives pre- and post-internship.

No significance was found from Hypothesis 3. The data related to this hypothesis is illustrated below in Table 7. This means that there is no difference in the intern students' scores on the accounting questions associated with the accountancy learning objectives.

Table 7
Hypothesis 3 Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q1b - POST_Q1c</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.568</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>-0.205 - 0.205</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q2 - POST_Q2</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.641</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>-0.137 - 0.325</td>
<td>0.828</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q3 - POST_Q3</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
<td>0.657</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>-0.273 - 0.209</td>
<td>-0.273</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0.787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q4 - POST_Q4</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>0.535</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>-0.005 - 0.380</td>
<td>1.982</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q5 - POST_Q5</td>
<td>-0.063</td>
<td>0.619</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>-0.286 - 0.161</td>
<td>-0.571</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q6 - POST_Q6</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.622</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>-0.224 - 0.224</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q7 - POST_Q7</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.359</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>-0.130 - 0.130</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q8 - POST_Q8</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.400</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>-0.113 - 0.176</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q9 - POST_Q9</td>
<td>-0.063</td>
<td>0.669</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>-0.304 - 0.179</td>
<td>-0.528</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q10 - POST_Q10</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.508</td>
<td>0.090</td>
<td>-0.183 - 0.183</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q11 - POST_Q11</td>
<td>-0.094</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>-0.262 - 0.074</td>
<td>-1.139</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q12 - POST_Q12</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.568</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>-0.205 - 0.205</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q13 - POST_Q13</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>0.354</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>-0.065 - 0.190</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE_Q14 - POST_Q14</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.508</td>
<td>0.090</td>
<td>-0.183 - 0.183</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Paired Sample T-Test  
b. PRE_Q(N) is the score on the pre-internship test for question N.  
c. POST_Q(N) is the score on the post-internship test for question N.  
d. p<.05
3. Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4: There is no change in student confidence in their scores pre- and post-internship. (CON_PRE_Q1 - 14 - CON_POST_Q1-14)

Hypothesis 4 had no significant findings. The data related to this hypothesis is included in Table 8. The students' confidence in their responses to the questions aligned with the learning objectives did not change from the pre-internship confidence to the post-internship confidence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q1b -</td>
<td>0.469</td>
<td>1.367</td>
<td>0.242</td>
<td>-0.024 - 0.962</td>
<td>1.939</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q1c</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q2 -</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>1.190</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>-0.366 - 0.491</td>
<td>0.297</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q3 -</td>
<td>-0.129</td>
<td>1.284</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>-0.600 - 0.342</td>
<td>-0.559</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0.580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q4 -</td>
<td>0.250</td>
<td>0.803</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>-0.040 - 0.540</td>
<td>1.761</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q5 -</td>
<td>-0.313</td>
<td>1.230</td>
<td>0.217</td>
<td>-0.756 - 0.131</td>
<td>-1.438</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q6 -</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.481</td>
<td>0.262</td>
<td>-0.534 - 0.534</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q7 -</td>
<td>-0.594</td>
<td>1.739</td>
<td>0.307</td>
<td>-1.221 - 0.033</td>
<td>-1.932</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q8 -</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>0.751</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>-0.146 - 0.396</td>
<td>0.941</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q9 -</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>1.230</td>
<td>0.217</td>
<td>-0.256 - 0.631</td>
<td>0.863</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q10 -</td>
<td>-0.161</td>
<td>0.934</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>-0.504 - 0.181</td>
<td>-0.961</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0.344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q11 -</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.244</td>
<td>0.220</td>
<td>-0.449 - 0.449</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q12 -</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>1.304</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>-0.376 - 0.564</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q13 -</td>
<td>0.281</td>
<td>1.170</td>
<td>0.207</td>
<td>-0.141 - 0.703</td>
<td>1.359</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_PRE_Q14 -</td>
<td>-0.125</td>
<td>1.040</td>
<td>0.184</td>
<td>-0.500 - 0.250</td>
<td>-0.680</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CON_POST_Q14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Paired Sample T-Test
b. CON_PRE_Q(N) is the score of confidence on the pre-internship test for question N.
c. CON_POST_Q(N) is the score of confidence on the post-internship test for question N.
d. p<.05
4. Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5: There is no change in student self-evaluation of competencies pre- and post-internship. (COMP_PRE_1 - 16 - COMP_POST_1 – 16)

Hypothesis 5 had several significant findings. From the pre and post-internship survey, the students’ confidence for several of the competencies outlined in the study improved after the internship experience. Of the 16 competencies, students’ responses indicated improvement in 7 of the competencies as seen in Table 9.

Students’ confidence had the most significant increase for technology skills, which include: Microsoft Excel, databases, accounting software, and data visualization software. Students also increased their confidence level with communication skills; these communication skills involved oral communication and written communication. Lastly, students’ confidence also increased significantly for accounting technical skills after their internship experience.
### Table 9

**Hypothesis 5 Test**

| Paired Differences | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | t    | df | Sig. (2-tailed)  
|--------------------|------|----------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------|------|----|-----------------  
| COMP_PRE 1b - COMP_POST 1c | -0.344 | 0.902 | 0.159 | -0.669 | -0.019 | -2.156 | 31 | **0.039**  
| COMP_PRE 2 - COMP_POST 2 | -0.406 | 0.615 | 0.109 | -0.628 | -0.185 | -3.738 | 31 | **0.001**  
| COMP_PRE 3 - COMP_POST 3 | -0.250 | 0.672 | 0.119 | -0.492 | -0.008 | -2.104 | 31 | **0.044**  
| COMP_PRE 4 - COMP_POST 4 | -0.188 | 0.644 | 0.114 | -0.420 | 0.045 | -1.646 | 31 | 0.110  
| COMP_PRE 5 - COMP_POST 5 | -0.250 | 0.762 | 0.135 | -0.525 | 0.025 | -1.856 | 31 | 0.073  
| COMP_PRE 6 - COMP_POST 6 | 0.063 | 0.564 | 0.100 | -0.141 | 0.266 | 0.626 | 31 | 0.536  
| COMP_PRE 7 - COMP_POST 7 | 0.063 | 0.435 | 0.077 | -0.094 | 0.219 | 0.812 | 31 | 0.423  
| COMP_PRE 8 - COMP_POST 8 | -0.250 | 0.880 | 0.156 | -0.567 | 0.067 | -1.607 | 31 | 0.118  
| COMP_PRE 9 - COMP_POST 9 | -0.125 | 0.609 | 0.108 | -0.345 | 0.095 | -1.161 | 31 | 0.255  
| COMP_PRE 10 - COMP_POST 10 | -0.375 | 0.707 | 0.125 | -0.630 | -0.120 | -3.000 | 31 | **0.005**  
| COMP_PRE 11 - COMP_POST 11 | -0.406 | 1.012 | 0.179 | -0.771 | -0.042 | -2.272 | 31 | **0.030**  
| COMP_PRE 12 - COMP_POST 12 | -0.938 | 1.294 | 0.229 | -1.404 | -0.471 | -4.100 | 31 | **0.000**  
| COMP_PRE 13 - COMP_POST 13 | -0.719 | 1.054 | 0.186 | -1.099 | -0.339 | -3.856 | 31 | **0.001**  
| COMP_PRE 14 - COMP_POST 14 | -0.063 | 0.716 | 0.127 | -0.321 | 0.196 | -0.494 | 31 | 0.625  
| COMP_PRE 15 - COMP_POST 15 | -0.094 | 0.689 | 0.122 | -0.342 | 0.155 | -0.770 | 31 | 0.447  
| COMP_PRE 16 - COMP_POST 16 | -0.281 | 0.958 | 0.169 | -0.627 | 0.064 | -1.660 | 31 | 0.107  

a. Paired Sample T-Test  
b. COMP_PRE_Q(N) is the confidence score of competencies on the pre-internship test for question N.  
c. COMP_POST_Q(N) is the confidence score of competencies on the post-internship test for question N.  
d. p<.05
5. Common themes

I attended all internship presentations and heard firsthand about each intern's experience and see overlapping themes across each intern's experience. A component of the presentation asked students to indicate their preparation from the accountancy department for their internship. These common themes ranged from certifications to coursework that ultimately helped prepare the students to be satisfied with their internship experience.

One of the most common discussion points in presentations revolved around interns earning their MS Excel Expert certification prior to starting their internship experience. Interns felt confident in their Excel skills and that they were comparable to a first-year staff's expertise level in Excel. Because of this, interns were familiar with different formulas, able to create pivot tables, and utilize different tables and charts.

Interns also brought up ACCY 375. In this course, students learned about writing with grammar and clarity. Major projects in this course involved the email thread dilemma and the memo. During presentations, interns emphasized their self-confidence in sending emails to various parties, such as managers, partners, and clients. Interns indicated that they felt comfortable in their ability to send professional emails and that it was second-nature after taking this course.

Interns also discussed ACCY 370. Many attributed their ability to land an internship to this course due to the networking opportunities, such as attending the accountancy career fair. Furthermore, this course helped students with the skills needed to be professional in various situations. For example, students completed mock interviews and an etiquette dinner which helped in the interview and workplace. Students felt confident entering an interview whether it was a first round on campus or a second-round interview at a firm's office with a business lunch.

At a high level, students also raved about the department's preparation for technical concepts from the rigorous coursework students endured prior to starting their internship. Students felt confident in their technical accountancy skills to understand the procedures occurring in different work papers. For example, most interns completed work papers on fixed assets, and these interns felt comfortable completing this work paper based on their background knowledge on fixed assets from the department's curriculum.

Finally, students also commonly discussed ethics and honesty. Although most of the interns indicated they never encountered a situation during their internship where their ethical
decision making was challenged, they indicated that they felt equipped from the department’s curriculum to work through an issue if presented with one.

6. My experience

After attending the internship presentations and learning about other interns’ experiences at their internships, I saw similarities and differences in my internship experience compared to the average intern’s experience.

Overall, my experience aligns with most interns’ regarding the preparation I felt I had from the coursework. I felt confident in my Excel skills, and it was a comforting feeling knowing I typically did not have to ask my in-charge simple Excel questions. I was unsure of my technical accounting skills prior to my internship, but once I was working through my own work papers, I was amazed at how much information began to click for me or that I recalled from courses I took over a year ago. Some of these technical concepts were more comprehensible seeing them in actual practice in comparison to applying these concepts on an exam question. My internship experience was a great learning experience overall and strengthened the skills I developed in the classroom.

I also noted a few differences between my experiences at my internship compared to the average intern’s experiences. These differences ultimately came down to differences that result from the type of firm where they interned. The difference is either size (big four versus local) or type (public versus private). Some of the differences involved firm culture, the work interns completed, and the day to day activities. In addition to this, I also experienced a variety of clients since I had seven different engagements during my internship. In contrast, some interns only had one or two clients throughout the duration of their internship.

Another difference I noted was the perception audit and tax interns had overall. As an audit intern, I felt in the dark on testing procedures since the application portion of these tests are not covered in coursework. Other audit intern also discussed this during their presentations. However, tax interns typically did not say anything regarding unpreparedness for their internship. Some tax interns already completed ACCY 450 prior to their internship, so they previously had projects where they worked through Form 1040’s and Form 1120’s. Because of this, these tax interns felt familiarity in some of the work they completed since they practiced the application base of these forms in class prior to their internship. On another note, some tax interns also did not have ACCY 450 prior to their internship. Without the class, they felt unsure
about their work and if this would be a disadvantage for them prior to starting their internship; however, most tax interns did not view this as a setback by not taking ACCY 450 prior to their internship.

IX. Curricular development

After my internship experience and reflecting on the current curriculum of NIU’s Department of Accountancy, there are a few suggestions I have for the department’s curriculum to ensure future students also have a satisfying internship experience.

From a broad perspective, students interested in pursuing accountancy need to be reached prior to their junior year. It should be more encouraged for students during their sophomore year to have an advising appointment with the accountancy department. As a sophomore, I was unaware of how my schedule senior year would change drastically. I expected to have a summer internship between my junior and senior year, and I was not aware that students commonly took busy-season internships while still graduating on time if planned properly. Some students may not be able to take summer courses prior to senior year in order to graduate on time. If accountancy students are made aware of this earlier in their academic career, they could potentially add another class or two into their schedule during junior year so that they do not have to take summer courses. While most students seemed to be able to fit summer courses into their schedule, some students are unable to do this due to living situations, work schedules, or financial situations. Furthermore, not being able to take summer classes can potentially push these students’ graduation back a semester, which also contributes to the issues of living situations, work schedules, and financial restraints. Early planning would help students start building time management, organization, and self-motivation competencies by planning ahead in their academic career as well as starting their professional career planning.

Students need a better introduction to the different accountancy fields prior to the recruitment process. With all the course content covered in the five weeks in ACCY 370, there is not ample time to discuss different sectors of the accounting profession. Currently, the only exposure students experience about audit and tax occurs at the Junior Kick-Off event. Here, students only get about a thirty-minute presentation, and a portion of this is involves the firm presentation discussing their firm solely. While the kick-off event was beneficial and a great introduction to the accountancy program, students need a more in-depth coverage on the different between audit and tax before the recruitment process. Currently, students are applying
for internships without truly knowing the difference between audit and tax and whether one is a better fit than the other for themselves. This adjustment would help students understand the application of the technical competencies they are taught inside the classroom and how it impacts their future career field.

Regarding the Learning Goals and Learning Objectives stated by the department, there is no mention of diversity or diversity awareness being placed in the coursework. With this being a major competency desired of new hires, this competency needs to be integrated into the coursework of the department. While the competency of diversity is not explicitly taught in technical accountancy courses, the application is seen across a variety of the courses. Students commonly participate in group where were they are paired with randomized groups. To have a successful team relationship in these situations, students need to learn to work effectively with others, and this may involve working with other students from different backgrounds, races, ethnicities, or religions.

Finally, students need better preparation if they are going into an audit internship so that they feel more confident in the work they are completing. During ACCY 360, there is not enough time for the professors to demonstrate different audit testing procedures one may encounter during the internship experience. However, interns commonly mentioned in their presentations that they never even saw an accounts receivable aging prior to their internship, for example. While this may be difficult to implement, I think introduction to audit testing procedures would be helpful students. Perhaps give students a workshop option to attend prior to their internship to walk through and practice the application of the testing procedures they may come across. In a workshop, students could learn how to complete a bank reconciliation, how to walk through an accounts receivable or accounts payable aging, and what a fixed asset rollforward looks like.

While there is a learning curve at the actual internship and dealing with prepared-by-client (PBC) files, having prior exposure to the format of simple work papers like these would give NIU students another competitive advantage as interns seeking a fulltime offer. Furthermore, this would help students further develop their problem solving, critical thinking, and technical competencies. By practicing testing procedure before the internship experience, students also begin to apply the analytical and skeptical mindset of an auditor which would better prepare them to have a successful internship experience.
X. Conclusion

Over the past year, I set out to measure if NIU’s Department of Accountancy curriculum and LOs prepared students for a successful internship experience. I outlined a list of sixteen competencies firms desire in new hires, and I developed an independent study to assess how the internship experience impacted students’ learning experience.

I researched what competencies firms are searching for in their new hires and determined why these competencies are crucial in these candidates. I immersed myself in the department’s curriculum, and I reflected on if/where these competencies are taught. I then explained how the department’s LOs supported these competencies.

While my own personal experience is helpful, collecting and comparing the experience of my fellow classmates is invaluable information to not only myself, but the Department of Accountancy as well. To complete this step, I created two surveys to administer before and after the internship experience. While a majority of my hypotheses did not return significant results, one hypothesis did. Students’ confidence level in almost half of the competencies increased during the few months these students experienced a busy-season internship.

The department’s goal is to instill the knowledge and skillset students need to enter the profession and have a satisfying, successful career. The department yearns to achieve this by developing curriculum around the LGs and LOs, then hire remarkable faculty and staff to bring the real-world experience into the classroom. These professors equip students with this invaluable learning experience rivaled of other universities. To further enhance this goal, the department encourages students to experience an internship prior to graduation. This aspect of the department’s structure is fundamental to students’ learning experience. Students return from their internship experience to finish their degree and then either enter the accountancy profession or continue their education with increased confidence levels in the competencies their future employers desire. This speaks volumes to the department’s program, the caliber of the students in the program, and the professionals who graduate from the program to go into the business world and represent NIU.

From the research and findings of my independent study. I hope the department will be able to inform curricular development to enhance the renowned parts of the program and further develop other aspects of the program to continue preparing students with the education and skillset for a successful career, the CPA exam, and all future endeavors they will encounter. I also hope this will strengthen the overall accountancy program to prepare the countless future students that will continue to pick this remarkable program.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desired skills of accounting graduate</th>
<th>Defined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competencies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Defined</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical skills</td>
<td>Technical knowledge for accountants includes: financial accounting and reporting, operational/management accounting, governmental accounting and reporting, auditing and attest services, and other areas (i.e. taxation, business law, and forensic accounting) (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 3-5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>A. Expresses information and concepts with conciseness and clarity when writing and speaking (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 20). Places information in appropriate context when listening, reading, writing, and speaking (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 20). Exchanges information appropriately while communicating via technology, such as e-mail, and discussion boards (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 21).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>C. Receives and originates direct and indirect messages as appropriate when listening, reading, writing, and speaking (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 20). Work collaboratively, listen to other viewpoints (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 44).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research skills</td>
<td>The capacity for inquiry, research, logical and analytical thinking, powers of reasoning, and critical analysis (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 13).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving / critical thinking</td>
<td>Ability to identify and solve unstructured problems (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 5). Identifies and gathers data from a wide variety of courses to provide insightful interpretations for decision-making (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 22).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>A program of learning that provides students with a framework of ethical reasoning, professional values, and attitudes for exercising professional skepticism and other behavior that is in the best interest of public and profession. At a minimum, an ethics program should provide a foundation for ethical reasoning and the core values of integrity, objectivity, and independence (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Part of communication and collaboration (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 6). Contributes to and supports the development of the team – continually builds and shares knowledge and engages in ongoing personal career growth (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 45).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity awareness</td>
<td>An understanding of the flows of ideas and events in history, the different cultures in today’s world, and an international outlook (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 11).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology skills</td>
<td><strong>A. Microsoft Excel</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. A spreadsheet program which allows one to enter numerical values or data into the rows or columns of a spreadsheet, and to use these numerical entries for such things as calculations, graphs, and statistical analysis (Carleton College, 2018).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>B. Databases</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. A set of data that has regular structure that is organized in such a way that a computer can easily find the desired information (The Linux Information Project, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>C. Accounting software</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Accounting software helps with: simplification, cost savings, full financial transparency, accurate forecasting, productivity, tax compliance, improved relationship with customers, and security (FinancesOnline, 2018).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>D. Data visualization</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Transforming data into graphics or images for ease of understanding or communication (Eaton, 2018).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization / time management</td>
<td>The ability to locate, obtain, organize, and understand information from human, print, and electronic resources (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 12). The ability to select and assign priorities within restricted recourses and to organize work to meet tight deadlines (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 13).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking / relationship building</td>
<td>The exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically, the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business (Geyer, 2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-motivation / taking initiative</td>
<td>Self-motivation includes: commitment to learning...both a skill and an attitude; self-direction to manage personal learning and work; accepts professional development as a lifelong process; and objectivity considers others' professional criticism or evaluation (AAA and AICPA, 2012, 6).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Learning Goals and Learning Objectives

Northern Illinois University
Department of Accountancy

Learning Goals and Objectives – Bachelor of Science in Accountancy Program (BS)

Graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Accountancy Program will be prepared for entrance into the profession or graduate study. They are expected to achieve the College of Business undergraduate learning goals and objectives and the following Department of Accountancy learning goals and objectives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING GOALS</th>
<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Develop and apply accounting and business knowledge</td>
<td>Learning Objective 1: Demonstrate appropriate knowledge of technical accounting concepts. Learning Objective 2: Identify problems and consider alternative solutions. Learning Objective 3: Select data and methodology needed to make decisions. Learning Objective 4: Apply appropriate technology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Demonstrate professional skills</td>
<td>Learning Objective 5: Write with clarity and appropriate grammar. Learning Objective 6: Deliver professional and effective presentations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Demonstrate awareness of ethical issues in business and accounting</td>
<td>Learning Objective 7: Articulate relevant codes of conduct and professional standards.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assurance of Learning

The NIU Department of Accountancy engages in assessment efforts to determine the degree to which we are achieving our learning objectives in support of our learning goals. To this end, we collect both direct and indirect measures of student learning. Direct assessment data is collected from faculty members who use a variety of course-embedded measures (e.g., project reports, exam questions, in-class presentations, etc.) and from employers who evaluate our students while on internship. Indirect assessment data (e.g., survey responses) are collected to complement our direct assessment observations. Each year, the Assistant Department Chair compiles the assessment data and presents it to the Curriculum Committee for its review. The Curriculum Committee chair then forwards the results of that review to the full faculty to foster continuous improvement and facilitate effective delivery of our curriculum.

*This table was prepared by Northern Illinois University Accountancy Department*
Appendix 3: BELIEF Decision-making card

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision-making Guide</th>
<th>Step 5: Assess options using various “tests”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Step:  
1. Determine the facts and state the problem.  
2. Identify the stakeholders.  
3. Identify relevant factors.  
4. List 3-5 options.  
5. Assess options using various tests (See Step 5 on the right side).  
6. Make a tentative choice.  
7. Review Steps 1-6. | a. Harm test  
b. Legality test  
c. Precedence test  
d. Publicity test  
e. Defensibility test  
f. Mom test  
g. Reversibility or “Golden Rule” test  
h. Virtues test  
i. Professional test  
j. Peer or colleague test  
k. “How does it make me feel?” test  
l. Organization test |
Appendix 4: Description of accountancy courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Course Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACCY 206 Introductory Financial</td>
<td>Introduction to financial accounting as a means for recording transactions and preparing financial statements for external reporting purposes. Examines the nature of accounting, basic accounting concepts, financial statements, accrual basis of accounting, the accounting cycle and internal control. Topics include corporate accounting for assets, liabilities and stockholders' equity, and the corporate income statement. Emphasis on usefulness of accounting information for business making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCY 207 Introductory Cost</td>
<td>Introduction to the study of the information required for decision making in management planning and control systems. Theory and application of product costing, operational control, cost allocation, and performance evaluation for manufacturing, merchandising, and service organizations. Topics include cost-volume-profit analysis, standard costing, budgeting, job order costing, activity-based costing, and process costing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCY 310 Accounting Information</td>
<td>Study or organization accounting information systems that capture information from the major business processes and transaction cycles. Emphasis on how these information systems serve as the basis for the function areas of accounting and business, including internal controls, databases, and other information technologies through a case study approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCY 320 Intermediate Cost</td>
<td>Study of managers' use of accounting information for decision making in manufacturing and service organizations. Topics include budgeting, cost estimation, cost allocation, cost-volume-profit analysis, non-routine decision making, transfer pricing, performance measurement, and the use of Excel for modeling business decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCY 360 Assurance Services</td>
<td>Study of assurance services, including auditing and attestation. Emphasis on underlying concepts, standards, and procedures associated with assurance services, including engagement planning, risk assessment, internal control testing, evidence gathering and documentation, and communication of findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCY 370 Accountancy Career</td>
<td>Explores the various career paths available to accountants. Assists in identifying and developing career goals, job search strategies and skills, and interpersonal skills. Activities include self-assessment and career goal planning, resume writing, mock interviews, networking, and information interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCY 375 Accountancy Writing Lab</td>
<td>Development of effective written communication skills appropriate for accounting professionals. Provides the accounting specific context to integrate technical accounting knowledge with the skills and abilities needed to integrate technical accounting knowledge in written form with a professional accounting environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCY 415 Data Analytics in</td>
<td>Study of the use of accounting data to identify, analyze and solve business problems. Examines the processes needed to develop, report and analyze accounting data and the business risk related to data collection, storage and use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCY 450 Taxation of Business</td>
<td>Study of basic concepts of federal income taxation related to business entities and individuals. Includes the study of property transactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entities and Individuals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5: Research Design

Learning Goals → Learning Objectives → Learning Outcomes → Internship Success

Department Level
- Example: Develop accountancy knowledge

Course Level
- Example: Demonstrate appropriate knowledge of concepts

Student Level
- Example: Calculate taxable income

Non-accountancy influencing variables
1. Personality traits
2. Prior work experience

Personality

Diagram showing the flow from learning goals to internships, highlighting departmental, course, and student level objectives with examples and non-accountancy influencing variables.
Appendix 6: Accountancy questions

LO 1: Technical  BLOOM CODE: 4 – analysis
1. The following information is available for Viral Company:

   Allowance for doubtful accounts at December 31, 2003  $8,000
   Credit sales during 2004  400,000
   Accounts receivable deemed worthless and written off during 2004  9,000

   As a result of a review and aging of accounts receivable in early January 2005, it has
   been determined that an allowance for doubtful accounts of $9,500 is needed at
   December 31, 2004. What amount should Viral record as “bad debt expense” for the year
   ended December 31, 2004?

   a. $8,500
   b. $9,500
   c. $10,500
   d. $17,500

   ANSWER: C

LO 1: Technical  BLOOM CODE: 4 – analysis
2. In determining basic earnings per share, dividends on nonconvertible cumulative
   preferred stock should be:
   a. Deducted from net income only if declared
   b. Added back to net income whether declared or not
   c. Deducted from net income whether declared or not
   d. Disregarded

   ANSWER: C

LO 2: Problem solving  BLOOM CODE: 6 – evaluation
3. Which of the following duties could be performed by the same individual without
   violating segregation of duties controls?
   a. Approving accounting software change requests and testing production
      scheduling software changes.
   b. Programming new code for accounting software and testing accounting software
      upgrades.
   c. Approving software changes and implementing the upgraded software.
   d. Managing accounts payable function and revising code for accounting software to
      more efficiently process discount due dates on vendor invoices.

   ANSWER: A

LO 2: Problem solving  BLOOM CODE: 5 – synthesis
4. To achieve effective segregation of duties, certain functions must be separated. Which of
   the following is the correct listing of the accounting-related functions that must be
   segregated?
   a. Control, recording, and monitoring
b. Control, custody, and authorization
c. Authorization, recording, and custody
d. Monitoring, recording, and planning

ANSWER: C

LO 3: Decision Making BLOOM CODE: 4 – analysis
5. What qualifies as appropriate evidence?
   a. Sufficient and reliable
   b. Relevant and reliable
   c. Appropriate and relevant
   d. Relevant and sufficient

ANSWER: B

LO 3: Decision Making BLOOM CODE: 3 – application
6. Audit procedures performed to test material misstatements in an account balance or
disclosure component of the financial statements, defines:
   a. Test of controls
   b. Substantive test of transactions
   c. Test of details
   d. Substantive procedures

ANSWER: D

LO 4: Appropriate technology BLOOM CODE: 4 – analysis
7. What software is best for calculating depreciation?
   a. Microsoft Access
   b. Tableau
   c. Microsoft Excel
   d. SAS

ANSWER: C

LO 4: Appropriate technology BLOOM CODE: 4 – analysis
8. Which of the following attributes would most likely be a primary key?
   a. Supplier name
   b. Supplier number
   c. Supplier Zip code
   d. Supplier account balance

ANSWER: B

LO 5: Write with clarity BLOOM CODE: 6 – evaluation
9. Read the statement below and then select the response that is written to clearly
communicate the statement’s intended message and to correct any grammar errors.

Several problem were uncovered by the auditors in Acme Corps financial records like it’s
depreciating policy handling of bad debts and it’s inventory accounting.
a) The auditors revealed several problems in Acme Corp.'s financial records, such as its depreciation policy, estimation of bad debts, and the accounting for inventory.

b) Several problems were uncovered in Acme Corps' financials, like its depreciating policy, handling of bad debts, and its inventory accounting.

c) Revealed by the auditors, several problems in Acme Corp.'s financial records were discovered, such as its depreciation policy, its handling of bad debt, and its inventory accounting.

d) The auditors revealed several problems in Acme Corp.'s financial records, such as: its depreciating policy, bad debts, and inventory accounts.

ANSWER: A

LO 5: Write with clarity   BLOOM CODE: 6 – evaluation
10. Read the statement below and then select the response that is written to clearly communicate the statement's intended message and to correct any grammar errors.

To increase the revenues from its new product an campaign for advertising was introduced in los angeles nyc and Chicago IL by the company

a) To increase revenues from its new product, the company introduced an advertising campaign in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago.

b) An campaign for advertising was introduced by the company to increase the revenues from its new product in Los Angeles, NYC, and Chicago.

c) Introduced in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago by the company was an advertising campaign to increase the revenues from its new product.

d) To increase the revenues from its new product, the company in LA, NYC, and CHI introduced a new advertising campaign.

ANSWER: A

LO 6: Effective presentation   BLOOM CODE 3 – application
11. Good speech delivery
   a. Is accompanied by frequent gestures
   b. Requires that the speaker have a strong voice
   c. Sounds conversational even though it has been rehearsed
   d. Draws the attention of the audience away from the message

ANSWER: C

LO 6: Effective presentation   BLOOM CODE 6 – evaluation
12. You have been asked to facilitate a discussion with the engagement team of twelve about the schedule for busy season. You know that some of the participants have high level anxiety regarding the balance in their personal work schedules. Which of the following would be the most effective way to get everyone on involved and buy-in to the schedule?
   a. Provide a detailed spreadsheet with all time slots that need to be filled and state that everyone has to sign up for 12 hour days.
   b. Provide a detailed spreadsheet with names assigned to all time slots and state that everyone is expected to report during their assigned hours.
c. Provide drinks and snacks during the meeting and open the floor to suggestions on how the team would like to approach divvying up the work during busy season, then execute those ideas.
d. Make a PowerPoint presentation on the importance of teamwork and make it clear that everyone has to participate during busy season.

ANSWER: C

LO 7: Professional codes and standards  BLOOM CODE: 2 – comprehension
13. Which of the following statements is true with respect to the AICPA’s Principles of Professional Conduct?
   a. Members are expected to work hard, but do not have to sacrifice their own best interests.
   b. Members must not only be competent when providing professional services, but also must cooperate with other members in the accounting profession.
   c. If a member understands generally accepted accounting principles and generally accepted accounting standards, then the member has satisfied the requirement of “due care”.
   d. Because the Code of Professional Conduct does not expressly prohibit a member from moonlighting as a performer, a member could perform at a local bar as “George the Singing CPA.”

ANSWER: B

LO 7: Professional codes and standards  BLOOM CODE: 4 – analysis
14. Which of the following statements best explains why the AICPA requires ethical standards and enforces compliance with the standards?
   a. To assure the practicing professional is acting in the best interest of the public.
   b. To establish ethical standards that stress the primary responsibility to clients and colleagues
   c. To assure that the CPA is not motivated by material rewards, but rather the CPA’s reputation is built on association with the reputable AICPA.
   d. Fear of enforcement of an established code of ethics is the best way to prevent unscrupulous acts.

ANSWER: A