

Internship as a Tool for Developing Competences in ESDAI Students, as the Key to Gaining Competitive Advantage for a Good Labor Positioning

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Introduction

ESDAI's Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality Management, (Universidad Panamericana), has consolidated a unique program for over 45 years. Founded in 1969, this program aims to educate the future leaders of the hospitality industry based on five main areas: Management, Sciences, Gastronomy and Services, Humanities, and Research.

Knowledge in these areas gives scientific soundness and ethical and anthropological foundation so that the services provided by the companies in which our students begin to work have the highest standards of quality, effectiveness, efficiency, and human approach.

Also, in order that such knowledge may turn into skills and attitudes, since 2009 the program is taught from a competences-based approach¹, through the development of a methodology that takes as its point of reference the advice of Alpha-Tuning Project for Europe and Latin American². Internships constitute a suitable environment for the development of competences, which are a comprehensive part of ESDAI's study program.

This case is based on the following assumptions:

1. Competency-based education is focused not only on the acquisition of knowledge, but on the skills, attitudes and expertise, which allow students a successful insertion into work teams, their performance as leaders, and the ability to solve problems and make decisions.
2. The design of an internship program based on a method for diagnosis and analytical tools in order to be able to design an improvement project, which enables a company to optimize resources or processes, is in fact a professional positioning strategy of the program.

¹ A competence is the set of combined, coordinated, and integrated knowledge, procedures and attitudes, put into action, allowing the individual to solve specific problems in unique contexts in an autonomous and flexible way (ILO, 2000).

² In 2000, a group of European universities took up the Bologna challenge collectively and designed the pilot project, known as the "Tuning Project" or "Tuning Educational Structures in Europe". This great effort provides guidelines for specific European interests (align curricular structures, programs, and teaching across the various national systems) but it is also relevant for Latin American countries because quality standards are integrated into the structures and content of program curricula in a way that they can be evaluated in comparable ways (<http://www.unideusto.org/tuning/>, en Padilla Lavín, 2011).

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3. Feedback by employers regarding the professional performance of ESDAI's students, based on competences, is a tool that allows the adaptation of the curricula to the needs and challenges of the labor market, in a highly competitive and innovative environment.

Program Based on ESDAI Competences

Since 2009, the needs of an increasingly globalized labor market and the competition among graduates from different academic institutions akin to ESDAI, served as a guideline to review the study program of the Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality Management, considering:

1. The essential need (...) to adapt our curriculum to a new global environment joined to the irrelevance, unattractive and repetition of contents in some subjects introduced over time.
2. The feedback received from companies and employers on some weaknesses in the education offered to our graduates. These results were obtained through the development of our actual competences diagnosis implemented in the graduate's workplace as a guide, for decision-making or changes to the curriculum.
3. The results of a thorough market survey on the provision of curriculum maps in other educational institutions and the possible disadvantages of having only female students.

Our grid reference during updating was keeping in mind our responsibility to maintain the formation of management professionals, highly trained in the analysis and solution of hospitality problems and institutions of service with a comprehensive view of customer needs (Padilla Lavín, 2011).

The inclusion of competences to study programs is supported by the advice of the Alpha-Tuning Project for Europe and Latin American. Among the advantages of the methodology are:

- A teaching based on a concept of competence as a dynamic reference point presents an important advantage in a changing world where requirements are often in a constant fluid state.
- The emphasis on students acquiring certain competences can positively affect the quality of educational programmes and constitute an important benefit to be competitive in the working world.
- The interest in developing competences in educational programmes matches an approach to education focused primarily

Table 1

Total population of graduate students from Classes 45 to 49

Information about the population of students	207	
Working	166	80.19%
Not working	41	19.81%

The statistical sample was obtained with the following formula:

$$n = \frac{N \cdot \sigma^2 \cdot Z^2}{(N - 1) \cdot e^2 + \sigma^2 \cdot Z^2}$$

on the student and on his or her capacity to learn, which requires greater self directed learning and effective commitment given that students themselves must develop the capacity to manage original information, find it, compare it, select it and assess it, using different systems (library, consulting teachers, exchange with peers, Internet, etc.). Knowledge and understanding must translate into effective practice.

- Contributing for a lifelong learning. Our society needs people able to manage knowledge, upgrade it, select what is most suitable for a given context, understand why and what for they are learning, so that they can adapt to new and changing situations with an autonomous performance, working with intellectual basis, interpreting situations and problem-solving.
- And finally, to make an alignment of the ideal university education with the real demands of the society and the hospitality sector (Beneitone P., 2007).

The 10 competences that are considered essential for the integration of students into the labor market in ESDAI are:

1. Flexibility and ability to adapt to new situations;
2. Problem solving;
3. Teamwork;
4. Autonomy;
5. Ability to relate to others;
6. Project Design and development;
7. Ability to put knowledge into practice;
8. Congruence (I act like I think);
9. Leadership and decision making;
10. Time management.

It must be stressed that these competences are sustained by a service spirit, which is the guiding principle of any hospitality related activity. This is the basic basis of ESDAI's bachelor's degree program (ESDAI, Escuela de Administración de instituciones de la Universidad Panamericana., 2009).

Internship Program

The internship program³ is a fundamental educational element

³ Internship is a part of the degree program in Hospitality Management, and is performed in three periods over 9 semesters. In the last period the students are given the option to carry them out in the institutions that fits their interests.

for ESDAI's students. Through it, the managerial competences (listed in the previous section) acquired in school are integrated with a practical approach in the workplace. This is direct hands-on training for when they join working teams in companies and institutions, and for the constitution of an improvement project in a specific area that may have an economic impact. Furthermore, they also constitute an opportunity for educational institutions to approach the industry and to position its students based on their professional profile.

The internship program seeks the following objectives: That institutions may get to know the students' profile, as well as information related to the program's progress and competences to be developed. That the students may detect areas of opportunity and develop improvement projects with a possible economic impact, with the advice from supervisors and expert teachers of ESDAI. That the students may apply the methodological tools for diagnosis, analysis and identification of areas for improvement at the companies where they work as interns (ESDAI, Escuela de Administración de instituciones de la Universidad Panamericana, 2009).

Competitive Environment

Competence models have become a very useful methodology to identify the skills needed both in the academia and in the hospitality and tourist industries (Chung - Herrera, 2003) (Tas, 1988). Besides the fact that some authors have highlighted the debate between education and industry concerning the perceived mismatch between hospitality graduates' knowledge and capabilities and industry needs (Jameson, 2000).

Competences are the necessary faculties, which according to their professional profile, graduates who are integrated into the labor market must possess. Therefore, the identification of said competences is an essential task in educational institutions, considering the professional profile of people who maintain a face-to-face relationship with guests and customers, which is fundamental for quality service.

This relationship between institutions of higher education and the labor market is mutually beneficial. Studies about the expectations of the hospitality industry allow educational institutions to improve their study programs and the qualities of their graduates, which results into prestige and a good reputation in both areas.

At the same time, this evidences that educational programs should be evaluated through the analysis of the success obtained by graduates in the workplace: jobs positions they fill, their job development, their level of income and the promotions they receive (Engelland, 2000) (Harris, 2006).

In Mexico, organizations such as the Tourism Ministry (SECTUR), the Center for Higher Studies in Tourism (CESTUR) and the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACyT) have undertaken the task of researching the adequacy of study programs in institutions with undergraduate programs in tourism and related industries to the labor market. The results of these studies show that programs are generally integrated by subjects

Table 2

Population arranged by Class 45 to 49 of the ESDAI graduates

Class	45	46	47	48	49	Totals
Information of the total of graduate students	52	4	53	50	48	207
Students working	40	4	47	40	35	166
Surveyed students working	28	3	32	32	25	120
% of range	70.00	75.00	68.09	80.00	71.43	72.29

Table 3

Percentages of offer, acceptance and change of job position per class.

Class	45	46	47	48	49	Average
Job offers as a result of professional practices	71%	100%	60%	71%	56%	72
Acceptance of the job offer	10%	100%	70%	60%	75%	63.0
Change of position	50%	100%	83%	50%	100%	76.6

that both encourage an integral training of the students as well as the development of job oriented competences in the tourism sector (SECTUR, CESTUR, CONACyT, 2012). Nevertheless, the outcome for the graduate’s labor profiles show that 92% of them work in operational positions, which does not correspond to a college undergraduate level.

Another fact evidenced by this study is the weakness of internship programs which turned out not to be a useful tool for getting their first job (SECTUR, CESTUR, CONACyT, 2012). The proof of this is the high percentage of graduates in operational and not in management positions.

According to this study, Internships face the unwillingness of employers and the absolute lack of follow-through in supervising the process by educational institutions; thus, these programs are not generating the competences of trouble-shooting and problem solving, needed in management levels (SECTUR, CESTUR, CONACyT, 2012). Employee attitudes, performance and behavior are key determinants of service quality, which has a direct linkage to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Heskett, 1994).

Methodology

The methodology followed in the development of this case was divided into two phases that are depicted below:

1st phase: Information of students graduated from ESDAI

- The database was requested to the graduate’s area and the job board of the Public Relations Area.
- The statistical sample of the universe of study was determined.
- The information was filtered by generation, identifying the graduate by alphabetical order, workplace and her current location via phone or email.
- The survey was designed with the central aim of gathering information about internship in terms of:
- Last period of internship; if a job was offered to her; if she decided to stay; which job position she had;

- If she has changed of area or position, and which was the salary range she earned.
- The survey was applied from September to December 2013.
- The analysis of results was made.

2nd phase: Information of employers about the graduated students from ESDAI

- The data base was requested to the Coordination of Institutional Relations and Internship in the academic area.
- The universe of study was determined.
- The questionnaires of the practitioner that were part of the final evaluation the company applies were analyzed, based on the level of development of specific competences in the activities performed by the students.

Analysis of Results

Phase 1

As shown in table 1, the population of graduate students from Classes 45 to 49 of ESDAI, corresponding to years 2009-2013, is 207 students, and only 80.19% of which are working, so this percentage of graduate students conforms the target population of study for this project.

A sample of 116 graduates was obtained for the survey, based on a universe of 166 graduates, with a confidence level of 95.5%, which corresponds to a value of 1.96, with a constant population standard deviation of 0.5 and an acceptable limit sampling error of 5%. To be representative and acceptable, the data obtained covered and exceeded the value of the sample by 3.33%. The survey was applied by phone and the response percentages per class were as follows:

Table 2 shows that, out of the total of students working, only 120 answered the survey, representing the 72.29%. The remaining 27.10% are looking for employment or there is no data for their location.

From the universe of students surveyed, an average of 72% stu-

dents received job offers, in the last period of internship, and 63% accepted. Further, the 76.6% changed to a better job position (table 3).

Chart 1 shows that, on average, 72% of students of classes surveyed had job offers as a result of the internship. These data show that, in the item of job offers, all classes are above the mean, which can be interpreted as professional practices constitute an important source of job creation for the ESDAI student when she is at her last period of internship.

Graph 2 shows that from the average among students of surveyed classes, more than 60% of the graduates accepted the job offer. The average percentage of acceptance showed in the statistical data provides clear evidence that the internship student has the opportunity to integrate into the labor market before the end of her undergraduate studies, allowing her career development at an early age.

These data show that in the acceptance of the job offer, all classes are above the mean, which can be interpreted to mean the internships offer the possibility of receiving an appealing enough offer to be accepted without looking for it in the labor market.

Regarding salary ranges, four ranges were established - from \$5000 to \$26000-higher incomes -, as presented in table 4 with intervals of \$5000. It can be seen that 60% of the students surveyed are in higher salary levels than \$16000; indicating attractive income levels compared with salaries of graduates of other management careers that start out as the student interns with levels lower than \$11000.4

The salary range that was established at 65% for the study corresponds to activities performed at managerial, executive and coordination levels; hence, approximately 61% of the salary level is between 16000 and over 26000.

Activities of student interns surveyed were developed within the

4 Data based on a study conducted by the school of business studies (ECCE), Universidad Panamericana, in 2012.

industry in various lines of business such as tourism, food and beverage, hospitals, event management and others.

Phase 2

The analysis of results regarding this phase is based on information that was obtained from the evaluation of competences that employers make to students who are covering a period of their professional practices. Within the framework of competences of the ESDAI student to be developed, as mentioned above, evaluated competences allow to establish the fundamental argument for the job offer in the latter period of the student internship.

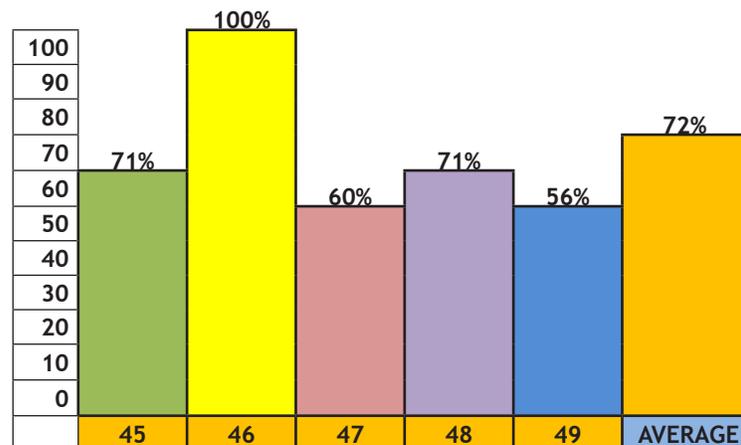
Using the same formula for obtaining the sample in phase 1, from out of a universe of 160 employers of different lines of business in the industry with a confidence level of 95.5%, which corresponds to a value of 1.96, with a constant population standard deviation of 0.5 and with an acceptable sampling error limit of 5%, a sample of 113 employers was obtained for a survey to be considered as suitable and representative.

Table 5 and graph 3 show the competences evaluated by employers, on a scale from 0 to 5, meaning zero as a no developed competence and 5 as the highest level of development, and the total average per competence. The employers in the sample belong to the various lines of business in the industry, and it is worth mentioning that the lines belonging to tourism, independent activity, and food and beverages show more frequency with regard to hospitals and other lines of business such as education and financial, among others.

Both table 5 and graph 3 shows that the competences that employers stand out as the most developed by the students of ESDAI, when performing their internship, are: ability to putting knowledge into practice, ability to interact, teamwork, and flexibility and ability to adapt to new situations, representing 76% coverage to reach the maxi-

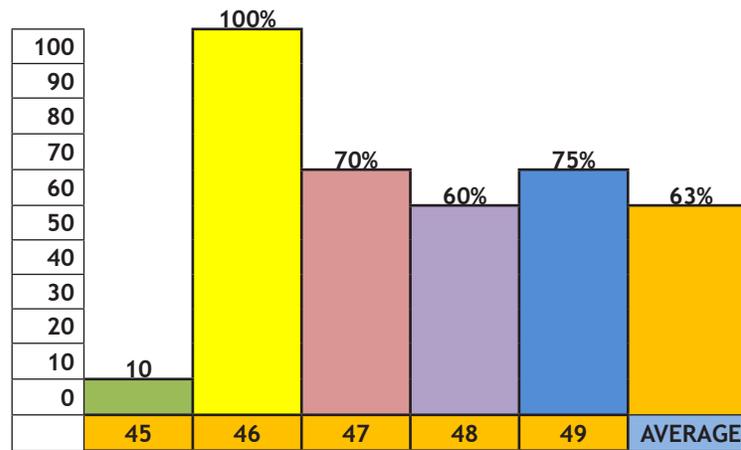
Graph 1

Job offers as a result of professional practices



Graph 2

Acceptance of the job offer



mum level of development. With 74% are organization of time and consistency; 72% are decision making, ability to work autonomously and problem solving; to finally reach the lowest evaluated competence with a 68% corresponding to project design and development.

Conclusion

In a highly competitive world, the requirement to get a job is greater, since the companies globally set even higher standards for the performance of their leaders.

Competition is the result of the proliferation of study programs akin ESDAI's Bachelor's Degree in Administration and Hospitality, so internship and competency-based education represent a competitive advantage for the students, which respond to the need to create a synergy between the institutions of higher education and the labor market.

ESDAI educates students based on the development of competences - supported by the spirit and quality service - which makes them capable of assuming managerial positions, exercising leadership and decision-making in the hospitality industry.

ESDAI internship program is an essential part of the positioning strategy of the ESDAI students in the labor market.

The periods of internships, which constitute an essential element

of the program of studies, allow students to offer viable improvement processes that represent an impact in enterprises and organizations which turns into: optimization of resources, decrease of costs and/or increase in utility, reaching a permanence in the market.

The quality of internships is maintained by the validity of the analysis tools and contact mechanisms with the companies and by the supervisors follow-up to the work of the students.

The Manual de Intervención (Intervention Handbook) which serves as a guideline for the design of improvement projects that the students carry out in companies is based on management, accounting and statistical analysis, which strongly influences in the positioning of the students and their prestige in the labor market.

Although the competence of project design and development, received a lower rating in the evaluation by employers, the implementation of the Intervention Handbook in the organization will allow that this competence develop further thanks to the identification of improvement processes and the design of new processes and performance measurement.

Table 4

Current salary ranges

Salary range	CLASS 45.	CLASS 46.	CLASS 47.	CLASS 48.	CLASS 49.	Total of students	% Total
5000-10000	3		5	5	6	19	15.83
11000-15000	3	1	7	9	8	28	23.33
16000-20000	7	1	8	7	8	31	25.83
21000-25000	7	1	7	6	1	22	18.33
26000 and more	8		5	5	2	20	16.67
	28	3	32	32	25	120	100.00

Table 5

Evaluation of competences by employers to the student interns

Competence	Average score
Flexibility and ability to adapt to new situations	3.8
Problem solving	3.6
Teamwork	3.8
Autonomy	3.6
Ability to interact	3.8
Project design and development	3.4
Ability to apply knowledge into practice	3.8
Coherece	3.7
Leadership and decision making	3.6
Organization of time	3.7

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Graph 3

Evaluation of competences by employers to the student interns

