

Assessing the Internship Program in Universities: Case study of United States International University (USIU)

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Abstract

Employers are increasingly supporting programs that equip students with hands-on business skills in an effort to address a gap between theory and practice. This in essence increases the student's degree of employability after graduating from university.

To address this mismatch, companies and universities have initiated the internship program or attachments where final year students pursuing various professions are given an opportunity to work in an effort to gain some experience and beef up other academic credentials that they may not have acquired in their course of study.

The United States International University (USIU) has been running such a program for over 20 years and has placed its students in several organizations both in Kenya and abroad. The university has forged close ties and signed memoranda of understanding with businesses for internships. In turn, the companies get a constant pool of manpower of young and dedicated talented men and women who often at times bring in fresh and challenging ideas to the organization. These internships usually run for 3 months for USIU and the students get a credit for the work done.

The main objective of this study is to find out the views of the employers in the job market regarding the quality and preparedness of the USIU interns. It also aims at providing strategies on how best the university can prepare the students for the job market.

The method used was a survey based on questionnaires that were given to the organizations to fill up.

The findings of this paper indicated that the USIU students adapted easily to the work environment, they were open to diverse multicultural perspectives. They were motivated

and had good communication and presentation skills. However, the findings showed that they did not exhibit good practical and writing skills and had no work experience. They also lacked initiative in carrying out certain tasks.

Introduction

According to Brow et al (1999), assessment has three aspects which consist of taking a sample of what students do, making inferences and estimating the worth of the actions. In regard, the assessment will seek to accomplish and establish this. Assessment should also be valid, reliable, measurable and transparent (Race, 2005).

Assessment is a central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning in higher education. Well designed assessments set clear expectations, establishes a reasonable workload and provides opportunities for students to self monitor, rehearse, practice and receive feedback.

Many institutions are currently going through academic reviews of their programs to make sure that they are meeting market needs and demands. For this reason the Internship office opted to do an assessment of the internship program to basically see how the employers gauge the USIU students who are carrying out their internship in various organizations.

Justification for the study

Due to the increasing competition from other universities for the scarce employment sites, USIU has opted to assess how employers view our interns in an effort to enable USIU to grow, change and improve its programs in line with the organizational demands and thus acquire constant and long-term sites for its students

Objectives for the study

The objective of the study is to find out the views of organizations concerning the quality and preparedness for the workplace of USIU internship students with a view of improving the quality of training and preparing students for the job market.

What is Internship?

Does this mean working without being paid? Is it a form of volunteerism? Well, let us describe what internship is. Internship is a program that enables students in their final year to practice what they have learnt in class. Ideally, internship is about putting theory into practice. It is known to be a time when students get a taste of the real work place and what goes on in the job market place, also referred to as the 'real world'. This is the time when new and fresh graduates get an opportunity to show case what they have learnt in class, explore various career fields; develop skills and experiences that may develop into their future career aspirations.

A successful internship is one that facilitates three aspects of a students' development: personal, professional, and civic. A student enters the program at different points in their development in these three categories, and with care and attention has the ability to grow in these areas as well. (Sweitzer & King 2009) The ability to look critically at information, as well as to think creatively, and to look at issues from multiple viewpoints constitute essential abilities that are catered for under personal development. So is the ability to communicate clearly both orally and in writing. Solving problems and working in teams are abilities that will serve the student at home, at work and in the community. (Crutcher, 2007)

Some students enter an internship primarily for career exploration. It is an opportunity to become socialized into the norms and values of a profession (Royse, Dhooper, & Rompf, 2007). For other students, the internship is the culminating academic experience in a highly structured and sequenced set of experiences and can be a chance to pull together and apply much of what they have learnt. (Sweitzer & King 2009) The internship also affords students the opportunity to understand the workplace in a more comprehensive manner than they do while in class.

The internship can also help students develop knowledge, skills and values that will make them become more responsible and contributing members of the community and society regardless of where they live and what they choose to do. This will in turn produce civic professionals, who embrace and always attempt to understand the human context of their individual work. (Sweitzer & King, 2009)

The United States International University has its internship period running for a period of 3 months or rather 400 hours which is equivalent to a regular academic semester that runs for fourteen weeks. This period is not limited to three months; it could be longer depending on the students' willingness to extend time or the organization's policies. The internship program is part of the degree requirements for students. The students is under supervision by an instructor who supervises the students during their working period to ensure that they are able to accomplish tasks as assigned up to completion of three months.

Why Internship?

For many students who long to finish school and establish their careers, internship becomes an opportunity to meet new people and network as a basis for later job search. For USIU, it is an opportunity to showcase its students for prospective employers. This is real because in the recent past, a good number of students have got employed in the same places/organizations that they were attached to during their internship. The advantage of the internship program is that it helps students in exploring work in their area of study, try something new, try and test potential employers. In addition, internship helps students to develop contacts for future employment and gain both knowledge and experience.

USIU graduates in the Workplace: What has been the experience?

A great deal has been heard from many employers with respect to the performance of USIU graduates. This comes from those employers that have offered internship opportunities to the students and also those that have retained them as employees.

The actual rating of the performance of USIU graduates is analyzed here below. Before the analysis, let us look at the criteria of gathering this information-methodology.

Methodology

The study utilizes the survey method with mainly quantitative questions. The following are the basic research questions:

- ❖ What are the organizations' ratings on USIU interns in terms of:
 - Appreciation of diversity and commonality of cultures represented in the work place;
 - Competence in communication and technological skill; interns' mastery of knowledge and its application in their areas of specialization;
 - Critical, analytical and creative thinking skills;
 - Sense of being part of a community and desire to be of service to it
 - How do USIU Internship students compare to students from other universities?
 - The overall performance of USIU interns
- ❖ What are the organizations' ratings on the following desired qualities of a good prospective employee:
 - Strong work ethic,
 - Professionalism,
 - Dependable and responsible,
 - Possessing a positive attitude,
 - Adaptability,
 - Honesty and Integrity,
 - Self motivated,
 - Motivated to grow and learn, and
 - Strong self confidence

- ❖ What are the perceived strengths of USIU interns?
- ❖ What are the perceived weaknesses of USIU interns?

In order to elicit the answers to the above questions, a questionnaire was administered to supervisors and heads of institutions/companies where USIU students have been placements on internship. The questionnaire has ten questions, two of which have a five scale point scoring ranging from excellent to below average. Two other questions are closed questions with choices to chose from for example 'Better, the same or Poor' while the last six questions are open ended aimed at getting the unseen feelings or experiences from those taking the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was given out to internship site supervisors (those that were directly involved in the progress of USIU students while undertaking their internship term) between June and December 2010. These questionnaires were circulated to organizations either directly over email from the Internship Office or by hand delivery through USIU lecturers as they visited the students for supervision. The number of respondents who successfully filled in the questionnaires was 12 from seven distinct organizations namely:

- S&L KCB,
- KCB,
- KPLC
- BARCLAYS,
- KAA,
- CFC-STANBIC BANK
- I&M BANK
- USAID
- USAID EXECUTIVE OFFICE
- U.S.EMBASSY
- SAI RAJ

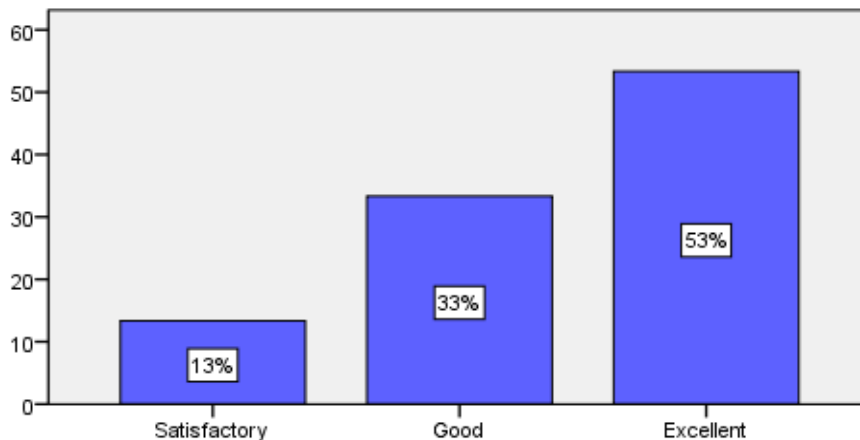
All the organizations which offer internship to our students were included although, not all of them were able to complete and submit back the questionnaires. All the students in various majors were considered i.e.

- A. International Business Administration (IBA), International Relations (IR), Psychology (PSY), Business Administration (BA), Accounting (ACT), Journalism (JRN), Hotel Management (HRM), Tourism management (TOU) and Information System and Technology (IST).
- B. Year of study: Final Year students.
- C. Sex: Male and female.

Findings and discussion

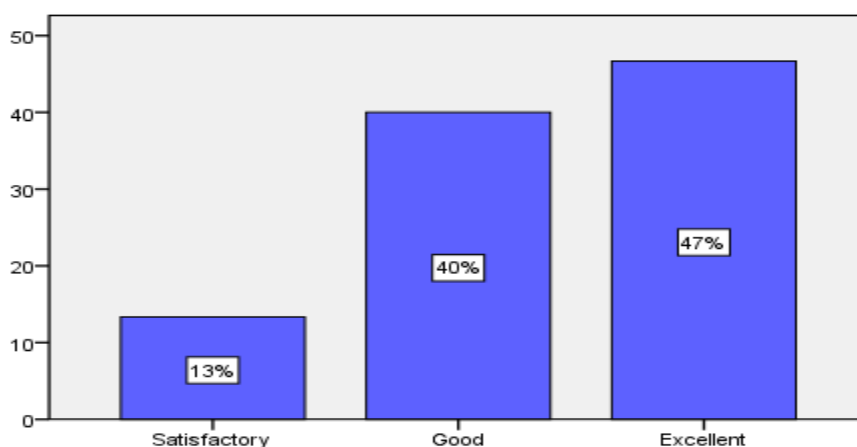
1. Please evaluate USIU interns by writing the appropriate answer for the statements below, according to this scale:
 - a. Interns’ appreciation of diversity and commonality of cultures represented in the work place

Interns’ appreciation of diversity and commonality of cultures represented in the work place.		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Satisfactory	2	13.3
Good	5	33.3
Excellent	8	53.3
Total	15	100.0



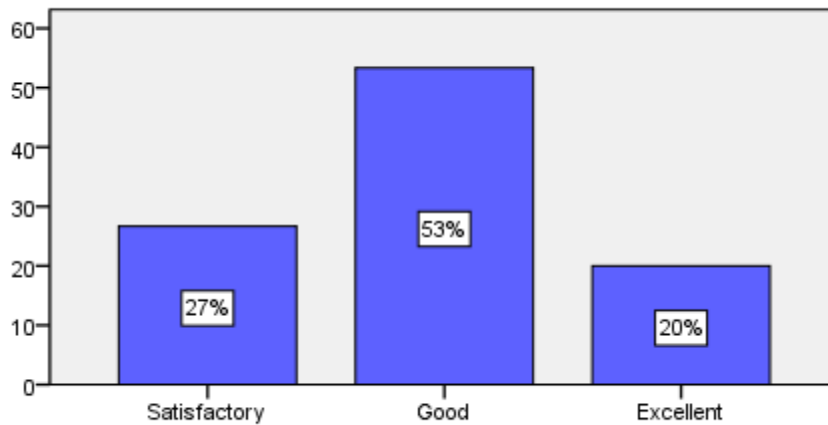
b. Interns’ competence in communication and technological skills

Interns’ Communication & Technological Competence skills.		
Scale	Frequency	
Satisfactory	2	13.3
Good	6	40.0
Excellent	7	46.7
Total	15	100.0



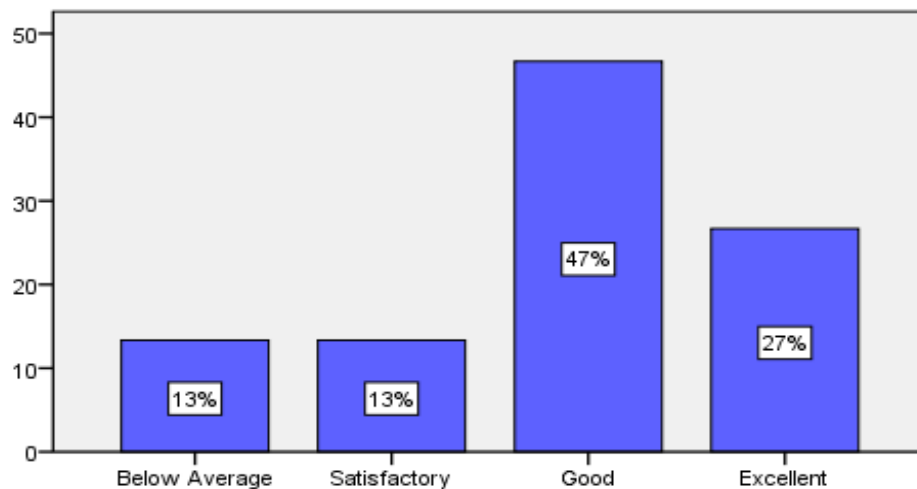
c. Interns’ mastery of knowledge and its application in their areas of specialization

Interns’ mastery of knowledge & its application in their areas of specialization		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Satisfactory	4	26.7
Good	8	53.3
Excellent	3	20.0
Total	15	100.0



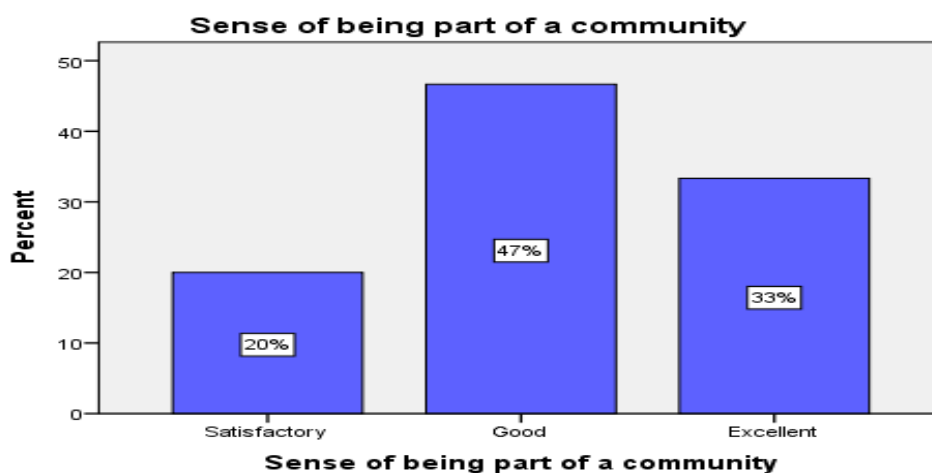
d. Interns' critical, analytical and creative thinking skills

Intern' Critical, Analytical & Creative thinking skills		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Below Average	2	13.3
Satisfactory	2	13.3
Good	7	46.7
Excellent	4	26.7
Total	15	100.0



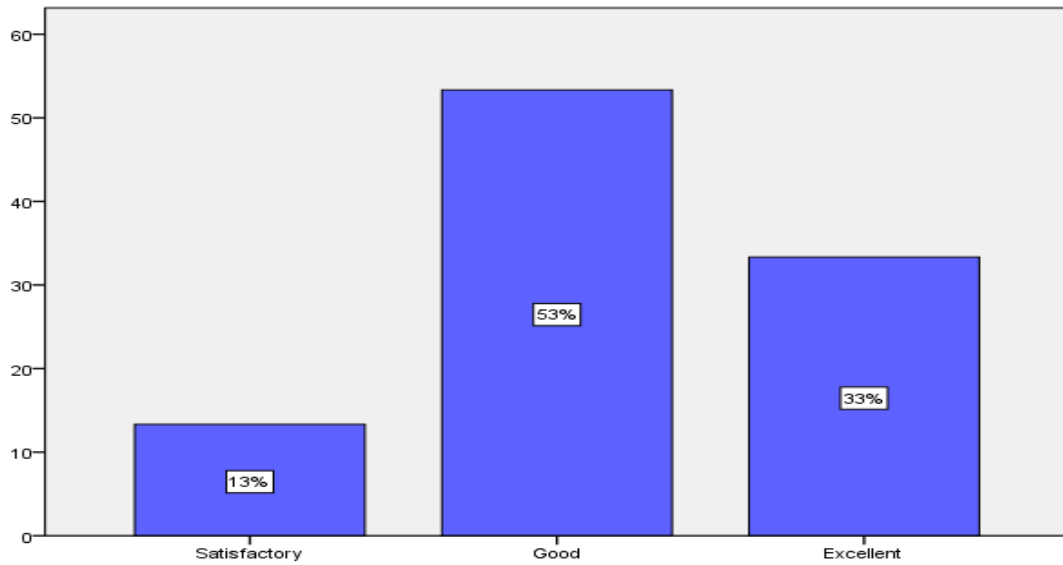
e. Interns' sense of being part of a community and desire to be of service to it.

Interns' sense of being part of a community and desire to be of service to it.		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Satisfactory	3	20.0
Good	7	46.7
Excellent	5	33.3
Total	15	100.0



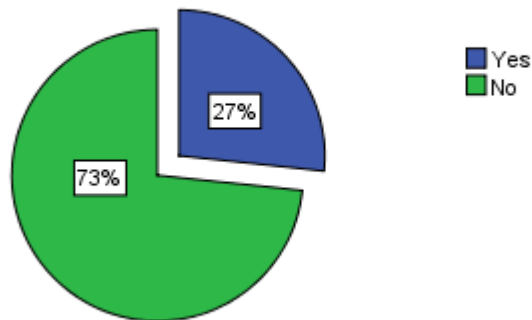
f. Overall performance of USIU interns

Overall performance of USIU interns		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Satisfactory	2	13.3
Good	8	53.3
Excellent	5	33.3
Total	15	100.0



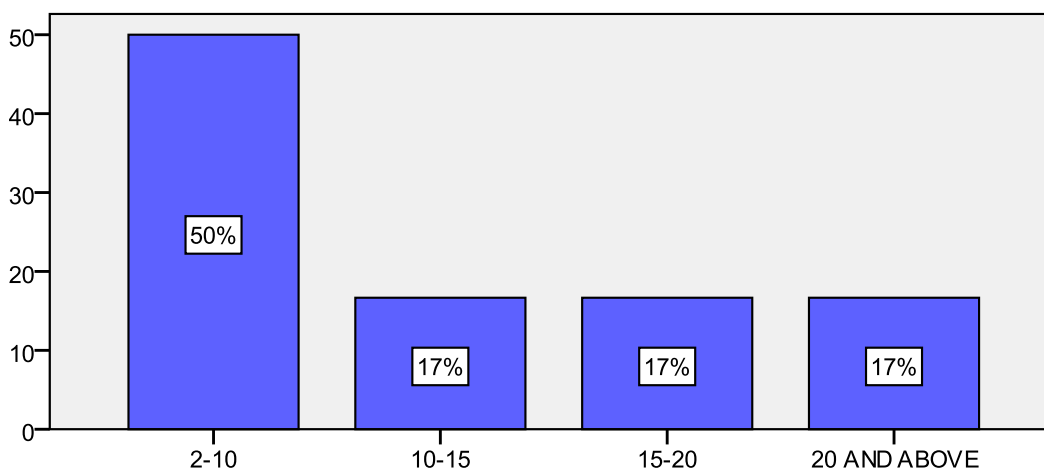
2. Is this the first time that your organization has hired a USIU student as an Intern?

Is this the first time that your organization has hired a USIU student as an intern		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	4	26.7
No	11	73.3
Total	15	100.0



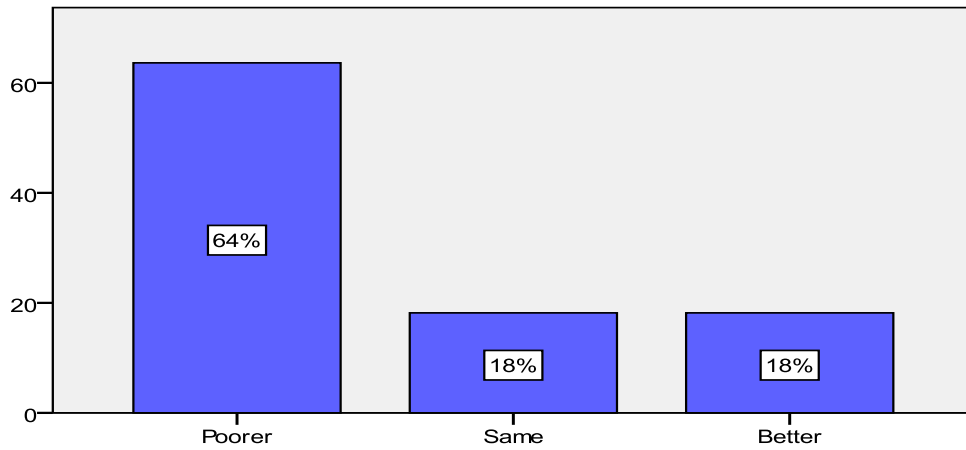
If No, how many USIU Interns has your organization hired so far?

No, how many USIU Interns has your organization hired so far		
No. of Interns	Frequency	Valid Percent
2-10	6	50.0
10-15	2	16.7
15-20	2	16.7
20 AND ABOVE	2	16.7
Total	12	100.0



3. In general, how do USIU Internship students compare to Students from other Universities?

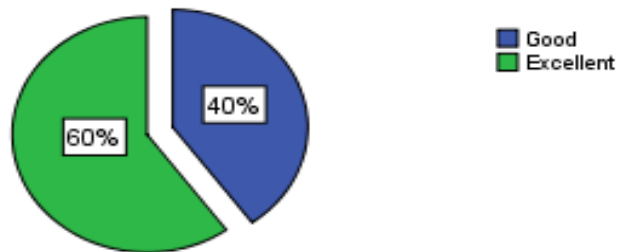
In general, how do USIU Internship students compare to student from other Universities		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Poorer	7	63.6
Same	2	18.2
Better	2	18.2
Total	11	100.0



4. Please rate the USIU Interns in the following desired qualities of a good prospective employee according to the scale below.

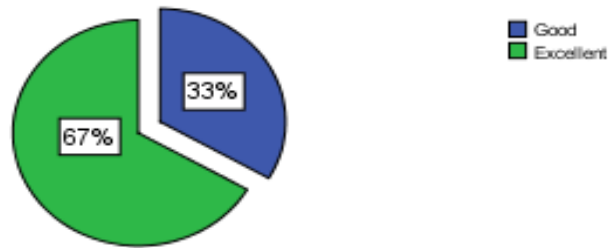
Question 4i: Strong work ethic.

Strong work ethic		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Good	6	40.0
Excellent	9	60.0
Total	15	100.0



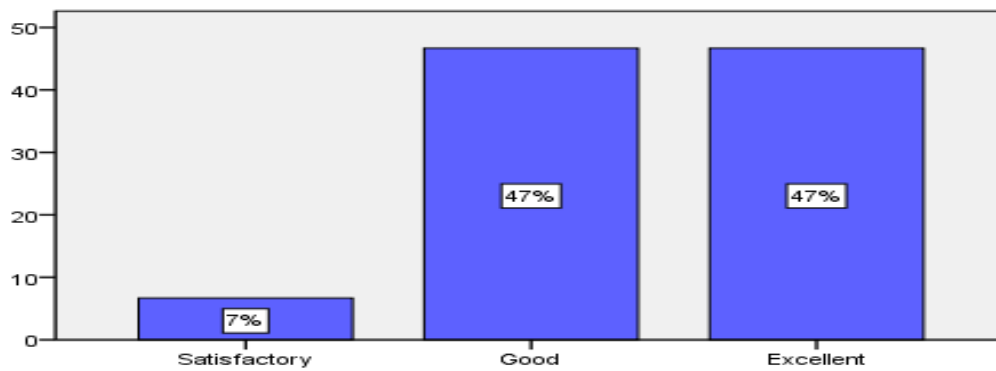
Question 4ii: Professionalism

Professionalism		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Good	5	33.3
Excellent	10	66.7
Total	15	100.0



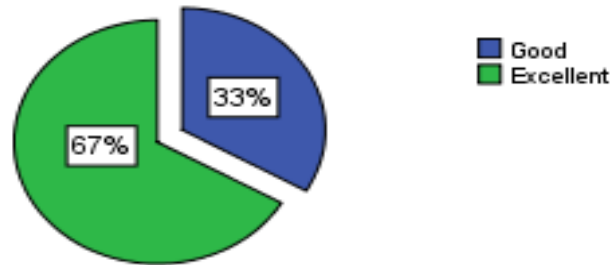
Question 4iii: Dependable and Responsible

Dependable and Responsible		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Satisfactory	1	6.7
Good	7	46.7
Excellent	7	46.7
Total	15	100.0



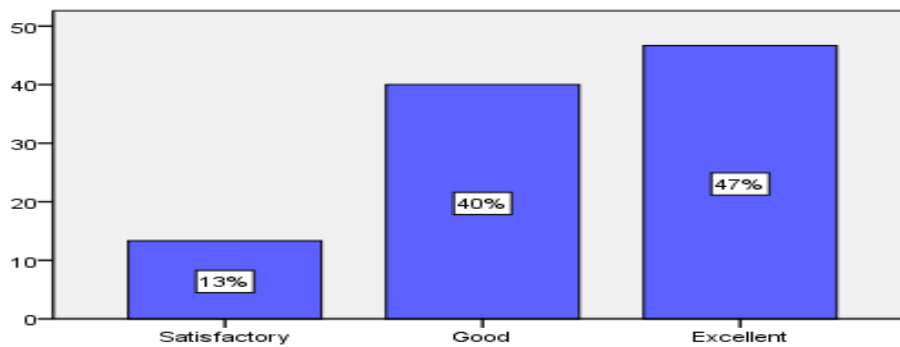
Question 4iv: Possessing a positive attitude.

Possessing a positive attitude		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Good	5	33.3
Excellent	10	66.7
Total	15	100.0



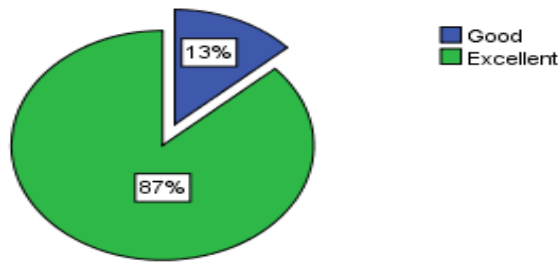
Question 4v: Adaptability

Adaptability		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Satisfactory	2	13.3
Good	6	40.0
Excellent	7	46.7
Total	15	100.0



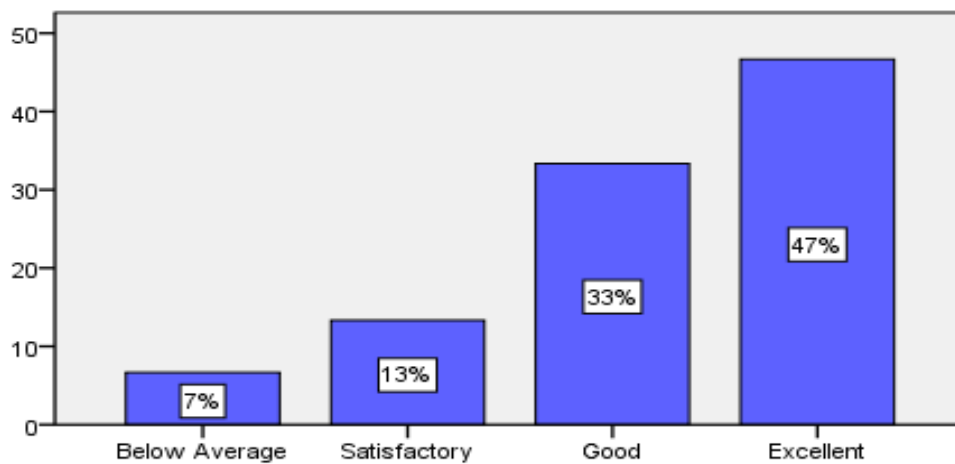
Question 4vi: Honesty and Integrity

Honesty and Integrity		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Good	2	13.3
Excellent	13	86.7
Total	15	100.0



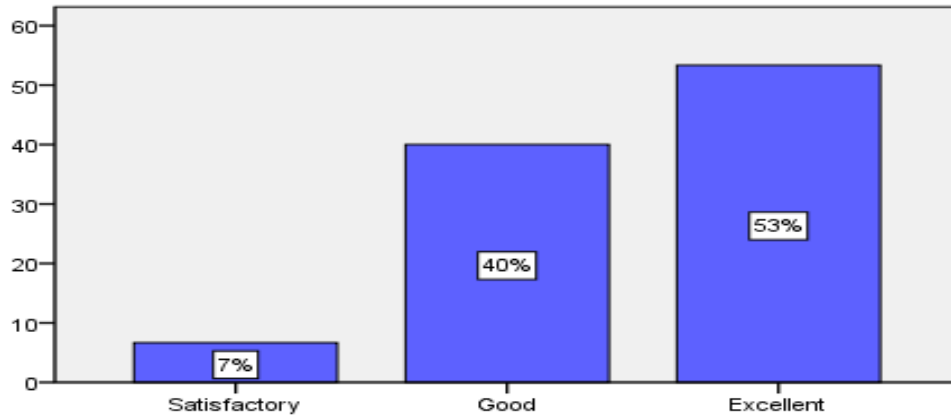
Question 4vii: Self motivated

Self motivated		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Below Average	1	6.7
Satisfactory	2	13.3
Good	5	33.3
Excellent	7	46.7
Total	15	100.0



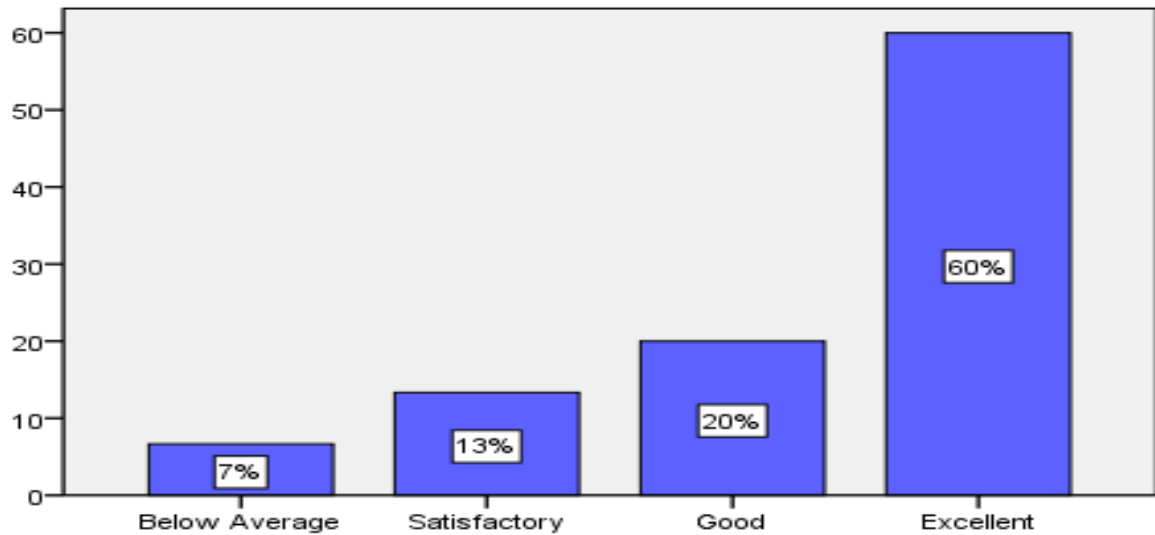
Question 4viii: Motivation for growth and learning

Motivation for growth and learning		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Satisfactory	1	6.7
Good	6	40.0
Excellent	8	53.3
Total	15	100.0



Question 4ix: Strong self-confidence

Strong self confidence		
Scale	Frequency	Valid Percent
Below Average	1	6.7
Satisfactory	2	13.3
Good	3	20.0
Excellent	9	60.0
Total	15	100.0



**5. In your experience, working with internship Students from USIU,
Question 5a: What do you perceive as their strengths?**

Name of Organization	Perceived strengths
Barclays	Adaptation to new environment, willingness to learn, self motivation, positive attitude and professionalism
BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION	Strong desire to learn and good communication
CFC-STANBIC BANK	Well exposed to industry matters, portray an official demeanor, quick to learn, reliable, and committed
I&M BANK	Good interpersonal skills, strong communication skills and willing to learn
KAA	Confidence and mastery of issues
KCB	Dependable, Self-motivated, Require less supervision Commitment to learn, positive attitude, and strong computer skills
KCB-Kipande hse	Ability to get on with the team, Strong self-confidence
KPLC	First class learners
S&L KCB	Confidence, ability to fit in diverse teams, good initiative and drive, receptive to teaching and correction
Sai Raj Ltd	Know a lot of theory of subject in question, Professionalism & Time management
US Embassy-Commercial Service	Hardworking, self-motivated & resourceful, accomplish tasks on time, Do not shy away from tasks accumulation, have good team spirit and keen to learn
USAID	Tremendous work ethic and eagerness to learn
USAID-Executive Office	Dedicated & eager to learn, Motivated to achieve higher to learn, Hardworking and produce good results
USAID-HR Section	Being youthful, Keen to learn & to please, Appreciate learning about the real world, Adaptable

Question 5b: What do you perceive as their weakness?

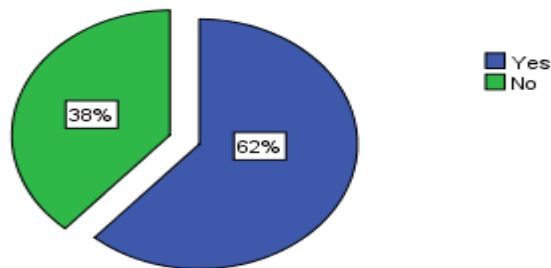
Name of Organization	Perceived weaknesses
BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION	Lack of confidence and initiative
CFC-STANBIC BANK	None
I&M BANK	None
KCB	None
KCB-Kipande hse	None
Sai Raj Ltd	No practical knowledge
US Embassy-Commercial Service	Experience
USAID	Poor writing skills
USAID-Executive Office	Lack of experience
USAID-HR Section	Lack of experience & self confidence

6. In what departments in your organization have USIU Internship students worked?

Name of Organization	Departments Interns work in
BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION	Trade & Investment section
CFC-STANBIC BANK	Corporate and Investment Banking, Operations, and HR
I&M BANK	Central marketing Unit
KCB	Advances, Customer care, Savings in Accounts & Administration Training
KCB-Kipande hse	customer Care, Operations, Credit, Business
KPLC	All IT departments
S&L KCB	Mortgage and Lending, Customer care, Accounts, Admin, Banking operations
Sai Raj Ltd	Front Office, Structured Network
US Embassy-Commercial Service	Commercial Service
USAID-Executive Office	Executive Office
USAID-HR Section	Executive Office HR, Office of Transition Initiative, Program Development & Analysis, Governing Justly & Democratically, Program Development & Implementation, Regional Health & HIV/AIDS, Regional Econ

7. Does your organization offer any pay or remuneration of any sort for students working as interns?

Does your organization offer any pay or remuneration of any sort for students working as interns		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	8	61.5
No	5	38.5
Total	13	100.0



8. Which areas would you advise us to improve on as far as the USIU Interns are concerned?

Name of Organization	Areas of Improvement
BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION	Build their confidence through participation in seminars & workshops
CFC-STANBIC BANK	None
I&M BANK	None
KAA	None
KCB	Ability to adapt to routine work
KCB-Kipande hse	More practical knowledge on business
KPLC	None
S&L KCB	Longer Internship period, provide research assignments for mutual benefit of bank and student
Sai Raj Ltd	Internship should be inline with career aspirations
US Embassy-Commercial Service	Work on getting clearance as early as possible
USAID	Improve Writing skills
USAID-Executive Office	None
USAID-HR Section	Reality Checks as to what the world is; need to be confident and take initiative

9. Do you have any suggestions on how we can make this program better and suitable for your organization?

Name of Organization	Suggestions/Recommendations
BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION	Give a brief of what is expected
CFC-STANBIC BANK	None
I&M BANK	None
KAA	None
KCB	None
KCB-Kipande hse	Let the companies know the Interns area of interest and study for better placement
KPLC	Request the HR Dept. to take more interns
S&L KCB	Partnership with bank for employment after internship
Sai Raj Ltd	Must have tutors to supervise the students
US Embassy-Commercial Service	Work on getting clearance as early as possible
USAID-Executive Office	Reminded of the seriousness of internship
USAID-HR Section	Reminded of the seriousness of internship

10. State a few skills that you would advise us to give to our students before we send them to your organization in future.

Name of Organization	Skills needed in future
BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION	Time management, Organizational, Report writing & Research
CFC-STANBIC BANK	Report Writing, Presentation Skills
I&M BANK	None
KAA	None
KCB	How to get used to routine work and be confident Handling diversity in an organization
KCB-Kipande Hse	Customer care skills
KPLC	None
Sai Raj Ltd	Practical skills
US Embassy-Commercial Service	None
USAID	Writing skills, Photography & Videographer
USAID-Executive Office	Office procedures, Office etiquette, Completed tasks in a timely manner
USAID-HR Section	Basic office procedures, Appropriate office technology, Office etiquette, Staying focused & completing tasks in a timely manner

Discussion and Conclusion

Generally, it was found that majority of students at USIU are open to diversity and commonality of different cultural views at the work place with competencies in communication and technological skills. The students were also quick to learn. This is an indication that the USIU students were well prepared to work with people from all various cultures represented in the work environment and they were quick to learn and exercise most of their skills learnt in class.

Since most of the USIU students do a lot of presentations in class they were able to quickly adopt and adjust to technology. However, some of them were not able to display practical skills but were very eager to learn from the supervisor. Some organizations were of the opinion that the students need to be more serious in the internship performance by understanding what internship really meant to them now and in the future. There were also indications of poor writing skill, and research.

Recommendations

As a university, it is important to note that there is need to instill a reading and writing culture among the students. They need to read a lot of books and have writing as part and parcel of all the research carried out in the course of their learning. Strategies like continuous practice in proposal writing and workshops need to be encouraged if we are to produce all rounded and prepared students for the work place.

All in all more organizations appreciated the students efforts towards the work they had been offered to undertake at the various internship sites.

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