

**OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: AN EVALUATION OF EQUINE INTERNSHIPS**

by

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## AWKNOLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Internships provide opportunities to gain experience. They have been shown to be beneficial in nursing and business, but equine internships have been lightly researched. This study explored student perceptions of equine internships. We hypothesized that participants would report that equine internships were valuable and relate that value with compensation, skill acquisition, networking, and job offers. An online survey distributed to equine and animal science programs included demographics and questions to determine respondents' perceived value of their equine internship. Participation in an equine internship within ten years and completion of 75% of questions were the criteria for inclusion. Of 228 respondents, 186 met the criteria for inclusion. Further, 92% gained new horse-related skills and 83% gained soft skills. Of respondents, 47% percent said their internship resulted in a job offer from that organization and 83% stated they were able to network within the equine industry. Overall, 91% of the respondents felt their internship was a valuable experience and 87% would recommend their internship to other students. The perceived value of the internship positively correlated with gaining new equine skills ( $R=0.49$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ) and networking ( $R=0.75$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ). These results suggest equine internships are positive experiences and valuable for students.

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## CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction:**

Enrollment in post-secondary degree granting institutions is projected to rise three percent in the next ten years, which means that over twenty million graduates will be competing for jobs by 2028 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This statistic can be overwhelming for those pursuing their education and preparing for a career. Students need opportunities that provide additional education to help them not only stand out to employers but to be successful in their chosen career. Experience is a key attribute that stands out to prospective employers. Internships can provide that experience (Gault, 2000). The goal of an internship program is to provide a smooth transition from the classroom to the workforce (Coco, 2000).

Internships provide hands-on learning opportunities to help students effectively gain knowledge. Edgar Dale studied learning theory in the mid 1940's and found that learners best retain knowledge through direct purposeful experiences (Dale, 1946). Dale's Cone of Experience (Figure 1) suggests that those experiences are the base of all learning. Students have a more positive attitude with hands-on experiential learning (Pugsley et al., 2003) and effectively gain more knowledge when a hands-on aspect involved (Wells et al. 2019).

Internships provide opportunities for students to get hands-on experience with an organization to enhance their academic and professional career. Internships expose students to real experiences that will prepare them for a job. It is critical for students gain practical skills and knowledge that will make them marketable when looking for jobs and to be successful in those jobs (Anderson, 2015).

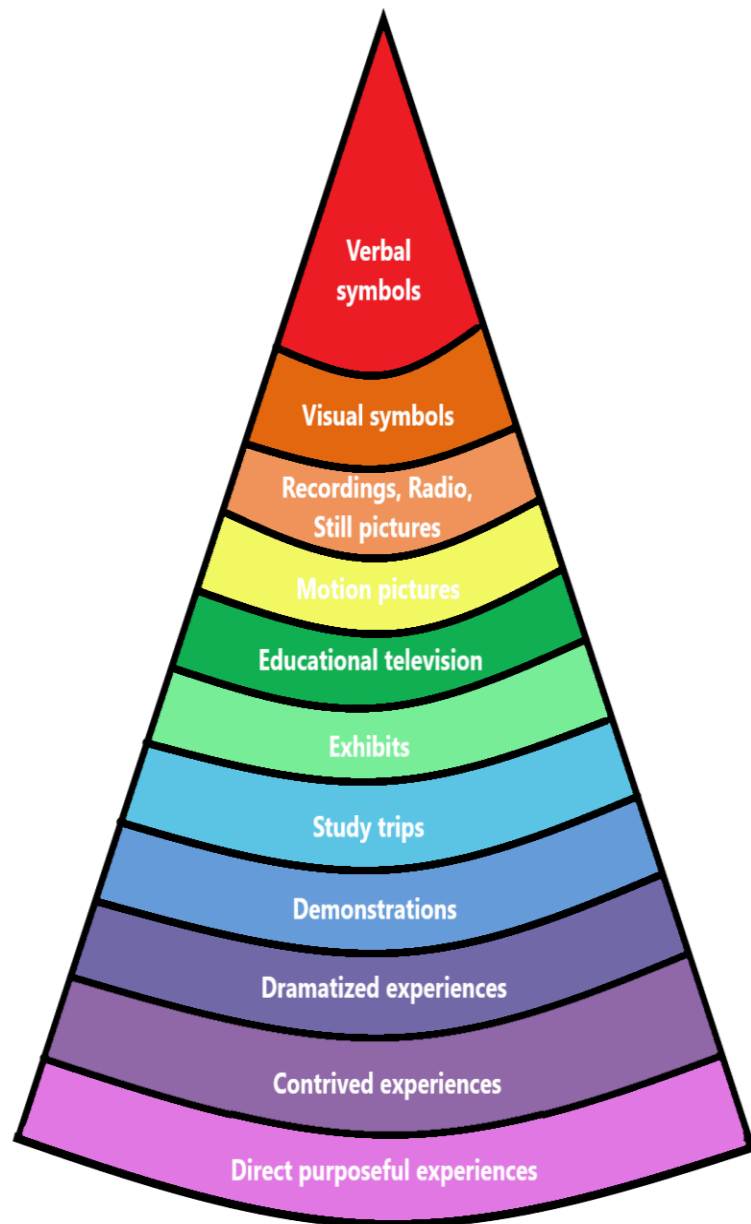


Figure 1: Edgar Dale's Cone of Experience. Illustrates that direct purposeful experiences are the foundation of learning. Adapted from Dale, 1946.



Internships also help students develop soft skills, such as communication, responsibility, dependability, and critical thinking (Marsh et al., 2016). They provide the opportunity for students to network and meet individuals within their industry of interest and those individuals could help them find a job (Hiller et al., 2013). Internships also provide first-hand career exploration (Anderson, 2015).

The prevalence of internships has grown over the last four decades and are a familiar element of the academic experience (Coco, 2000; Hurst and Good, 2010). An estimated three out of four students will participate in an internship prior to graduation.

### **The Growth of the Equine Industry**

The demographics of agricultural undergraduates has changed over the past 25 years with increasing numbers of students with urban backgrounds being interested in agriculture (Dryer, 1996). According to Peffer (2010), undergraduate agriculture students indicate companion animals and horses as their preferred species. This interest in equines can be attributed to the fact that students in animal sciences are often most interested in animals that they are familiar with (McNamara, 2009). The impact of the equine industry in the United States is significant and according to the American Horse Council (2018), participation in horse events is skewed more towards youth than adults. This may be a good indicator that there will be an increase of students pursuing equine degrees.

Currently there are 7.2 million horses in the United States and the equine industry contributes roughly \$122 billion to America's Gross Domestic Product (American Horse Council, 2018). This economic impact includes a wide range of spending, from direct farm expenses such as payroll or buying feed, to indirect effects such as paying for a hotel to attend the Kentucky Derby. The impact supports over 1.7 million jobs and of

those, almost one million, are directly working with horses (American Horse Council, 2018). This is an increase over a previous 2005 report, when the horse population was higher (approximately 9 million) but only 453,000 equine industry jobs were directly working with horses (Long and Morgan, 2010). The substantial growth in hands-on equine industry jobs supports the relevance of an equine degree. According to Long and Morgan (2010), students need to not only have a good idea of how to work with horses but need to be introduced to the depth and breadth of the equine industry; internships are a useful resource to do that.

### **A Need for Equine Internships**

Because of the growth in hands-on equine industry careers, students need hands-on experiences that allow them to apply their course work (Long and Morgan, 2010). A study conducted at the University of Wyoming found that faculty recognized a need for equine internships as a part of their equine program. The study aimed to determine the objectives, courses, resources, and curriculum necessary for a successful two-year equine degree (Long and Morgan, 2010). The study surveyed 21 expert faculty at two-year public institutions that offered an Associate of Science or an Associate of Applied Science in an equine-specific area such as Equine Management or Equine Business. When asked, “what should be the objectives of a two-year equine program,” 96% of respondents indicated it was important to help students develop skills needed by utilizing hands-on experiences and applied study (Long and Morgan, 2010). When asked, “what courses, laboratories, and student experiences should be included in a two-year equine degree program,” there was a 96% level of agreement that an internship would be beneficial for students. One participant stated, “Hands-on is very important. So many

times, I see students who can give you the textbook answer but have never had the opportunity to perform the procedure themselves” (Long and Morgan, 2010). The study concluded that equine programs in post-secondary institutions should be focused on preparing students to enter the equine industry, and to successfully do that, the use of hands-on experiences should be implemented so students can apply classroom knowledge into a practical career context (Long and Morgan, 2010). Whether that be through class laboratories or internships, programs need to determine what works best in their facet and implement those in their curriculum. The study had a low response rate of 24% but the researchers found that this was reasonable for the population (Long and Morgan, 2010). The low population and response rate indicate a need for more research on whether faculty think that internships are vital to their equine programs.

Research about the benefits and limitations of equine internships is scarce with only one known study. However, there has been research conducted on the impact of internships in different undergraduate fields.

### **Health Care Internships**

Internships are implemented in many industries throughout the world. Health care is a very hands-on industry, and the need for exposure to real situations is vital to career success. The University of New Mexico Hospitals created an internship program for prelicensure RN students to increase experience, mitigate low retention rates, and increase the number of RNs who stay and work in the state after graduation (Hernandez et al., 2020). The study was conducted to see if those newly graduated RNs who participated in the internship program were employed by the hospital after graduation and to review retention rates of those RNs that participated in the internship. Of the 472

interns that participated in the internship, 404 were hired by the University of New Mexico Hospital upon graduation. When examining retention rates, 84.4% of interns were still employed at the hospital after one year and 43.3% were employed after five years. (Hernandez et al., 2020) The study did not provide information as to why the retention rate dropped after five years.

Nursing graduates who participated in an externship program developed new skills, learned how to be a team, and gained confidence (Starr and Conley, 2006). While not the same as an internship, externships allow similar experiential learning opportunities and so are included in this literature review. The study collected data from externs that participated in the Yuma Regional Medical Center Externship Program and the data was collected through interview research technologies (Starr and Conley, 2006).

The informants believed that participation in the program helped them understand the role of a registered nurse and helped them discover the skills needed to be successful in that position (Starr and Conley, 2006). Participants also believed their experience was the reason their confidence and skills grew (Starr and Conley, 2006). A major benefit that participants recognized during the program was learning to become a member of a team and earn the respect of their peers (Starr and Conley, 2006). The sample size for this study was small (n= 10) and causes for some limitation; however, the responses by informants indicate they are appreciative of the opportunity to learn skills and application of concepts (Starr and Conley, 2006).

### **Environmental Health Internships**

The value of the National Environmental Public Health Internship Program which provides state, tribal, and local health department internships for environmental health

students across the country was examined by Gerding et al. (2020). During the internship program, host health departments provide students with a mentor who interacts and advises them daily. The program connects interns with real work experiences with the possibility of receiving a job offer upon completion. The study assessed former intern and mentor perspectives and the impact of internships for developing and strengthening the environmental health workforce (Gerding et al., 2020).

Interns reported they gained experience and skills in many areas. Seventy percent reported improved skills in areas such as decision making, problem solving, critical thinking, collecting and analyzing data, and communicating to the public. These skills are not only important to the environmental health industry, but they help develop soft skills that make a person successful in any industry. Gerding et al. (2020) stated that “the breadth of experiences provided by host health departments could have contributed to the high percentage of interns indicating their internships prepared them for their first job in environmental health”. Of those respondents that participated in the program, 30% received a job offer from their host health departments and 67% were more likely to pursue a position at a public health department. Seventeen interns reported current employment in the environmental health field and 12 of those were employed by a state or local health department. Of those that were not currently employed, eight were still finishing their education or pursuing graduate degrees (Gerding et al., 2020). Overall, participation in the internship program provided students with the opportunity to gain practical skills and a chance for future employment within the environmental health industry.

Some limitations and challenges of internships were identified within this study. Mentors reported the biggest challenges of hiring interns were no vacancies for their skill level and interns were not interested in relocating (Gerding et al., 2020). Researchers suggest high cost of living was the reason for interns not wanting to relocate. A limitation to this study was that the internship program was new and therefore provided a small sample size, which may not have provided an accurate representation of the value of the internship program.

### **Business Internships**

Like the environmental health and health care industries, the goal of a business program is focused on providing students with practical experience to help them enter the work force. Gault et al. (2000) studied the effects of field internships on job preparedness and early career success of undergraduate business majors. Their sample consisted of 144 alumni that had graduated within the past 1 to 5 years. Forty-six of the respondents had not participated in an undergraduate internship and 98 had participated in an undergraduate internship while pursuing their degree. The researchers analyzed 13 skill areas that would help a student be more qualified for the workforce. These skills include creative thinking, job networking relationship building, and written communication (Gault et al., 2000). Respondents that participated in an internship felt their internship prepared them better than the university in creative thinking, job networking, and relationship building. Gault et al. (2000) stated, “the internship simply provided a more novel, timely, and contextually rich exposure to these career skills already learned in the university”. This supports the idea that internships enhance university learning and give students the opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom.

The study further evaluated job success of interns versus non-interns that recently graduated from the business program (Gault et al., 2000). Respondents that participated in an internship reported they received greater entry-level compensation than non-interns, with starting salaries averaging \$2,240 higher than non-interns. Further, interns were not only getting offered higher salaries at the start of their job but the spread between the current salaries of interns to non-interns increased with time, with current salaries for interns averaged \$4,600 more than non-interns (Gault et al., 2000).

Similarly, interns averaged two months to obtain a job versus four months for non-interns (Gault et al., 2000). Researchers suggest this difference in time can be explained by the perception that internships provide skills that better prepare students for the workforce. Internships also provide students with a better idea of what they want to pursue and by gaining real world experience, interns get good insight on what is available and what positions they have interest in (Gault et al. 2000).

Like nursing and environmental health studies, this study was conducted at one institution. It is stated, “the sample was drawn from a single institution and therefore may not apply to all institutions of higher learning” (Gault et al., 2000).

### **Equine Industry Internships**

The benefits and limitations of equine internships have been scarcely researched, with only one study reported. The study assessed student’s perceived value of their equine internship experience as well as employer’s evaluation of their interns (Anderson, 2015). Like other studies, Anderson (2015), agrees that hands-on experience provides essential skills for students to be successful in the workforce. She states, “it is critical for

students to gain hands-on experience and technical skills to be marketable and credible in the equine industry” (Anderson, 2015).

In this study, 18 students at the University of Nebraska were enrolled in an equine internship between 2007 and 2012. At the end of their internship students completed a self-reflective survey on what they gained from the experience, how prepared they felt before the internship, and the benefits to career exploration resulting from their internship (Anderson, 2015). Students reported that the overall the experience was beneficial. The highest levels of agreement were related to “new information learned” and that they “learned new techniques and methods” (Anderson, 2015). The interns also strongly agreed that their internship experience provided them with the opportunity to explore a specific career and they moderately agreed that they gained an increased understanding of various potential careers (Anderson, 2015). The small sample size in this study does not provide ample information to really understand the value of equine internships. The demographics to this study are also very limiting as it only surveys students at one university in the Midwest United States.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review has discussed how internships provide students with opportunities that make them marketable to employers. Internships have been shown to be beneficial in industries such as business, environmental health, and nursing, but equine internships have been scarcely researched. The equine industry is growing and there is a need for individuals with hands-on skills and industry experience.



## **CHAPTER II: OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: AN EVALUATION OF EQUINE INTERNSHIPS**

### **Introduction**

Internships have been shown to be beneficial for industries such as business and nursing. They put students into real life situations that they may face when out in the workforce and provide opportunities to gain new skills and experience. This knowledge and skill may lead to a quicker hiring process and a higher pay rate. Equine internships have been shown to be valuable to students and some think internships should be a necessary component to equine programs.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate student perceptions of their equine internships and to look at what factors correlate with that perceived value. We hypothesized that participants would report that equine internships were valuable and relate that value with compensation, skill acquisition, networking, and job offers.

### **Materials and Methods**

In this study, an online survey was developed and administered using Qualtrics, a survey creation software that allows data collection, storage, and analysis. The survey and all methods were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Middle Tennessee State University (Protocol ID# 21-1081 2q; Appendix A). The survey was widely distributed to equine and animal science programs nationwide and shared via social media (Facebook). A survey link was made available for respondents to complete beginning December 15, 2020 and closed on February 4, 2021. The information gathered in this survey contained no identity specific questions and all responses were completely anonymous. The complete survey can be found as Appendix B.

Briefly, respondents were first asked to answer a series of consent questions along with confirming they were 18 years of age or older. Respondents were then directed to an elimination question of whether they participated in an equine internship within the past 10 years. All “no” responses were directed to the end of the survey and the “yes” responses progressed to the remainder of the survey. Respondents were then asked a series of demographic questions including, if they received or were currently pursuing a degree in animal science, equine science, or horse science, if they completed their internship, if their internship was required for their degree, and if they received course credit for their internship. They were asked what area of the equine industry their internship was most involved (e.g., western training/performance, english training/performance, racing, breeding, equine research, publication/journalism, veterinary), if their internship was paid or unpaid, if housing was provided, and if they moved to participate in the internship.

To understand the respondent’s knowledge gained from the internship, the next series of questions asked about prior experience, if the internship added to what they had learned in the classroom, and if their academic program helped prepare them for their internship. Respondents were asked a series of 5-pt Likert scale questions to determine the perceived value of their internship experience.

Responses were collected for a period of 52 days, at which point, data collection was stopped, and the survey link was closed. Before survey evaluation, the criteria for inclusion were established to be those who had participated in an equine internship within the past ten years. Respondents who answered “no” were not included in the data analysis. Summary statistics and frequency counts of the data were completed using the

survey software Qualtrics (SAP Qualtrics XM, Provo, Utah). Data were examined using frequency counts, Pearson's correlation coefficients, and chi-square measures of association (SAS 9.4, SAS Stat. Inc., Cary, NC).

## **RESULTS**

### **Demographics**

In total, 228 respondents started the survey, of which, 186 met the criteria for inclusion. The inclusion criteria consisted of answering "Yes" to the question, "within the past 10 years, have you participated in an equine internship or are you currently participating in an equine internship?" and completing 75% of the survey. Results showed a wide range of industry areas in which respondents participated in internships. Breeding (28%) was the most common and western training and performance (18%) was the second most common reported. Other industry areas represented were veterinary (9%), English training and performance (9%), racing (8%) and breed association (6%). A full summary of industry areas reported is shown in Figure 2.

There was no effect of industry area and perceived value of the internship experience ( $P=0.14$ ). Of respondents, 88% in breeding internships thought their internship experience was valuable; 10% did not. Similarly, 88% that participated in veterinary internships thought the experience was valuable. Of those that participated in a breed association internship, 90% thought it was valuable, and 100% of those that participated in horse show management internships felt it was a valuable experience.

### **Institution Requirements**

Of the 186 respondents, 94% had received or were currently pursuing a degree in animal science or equine science.

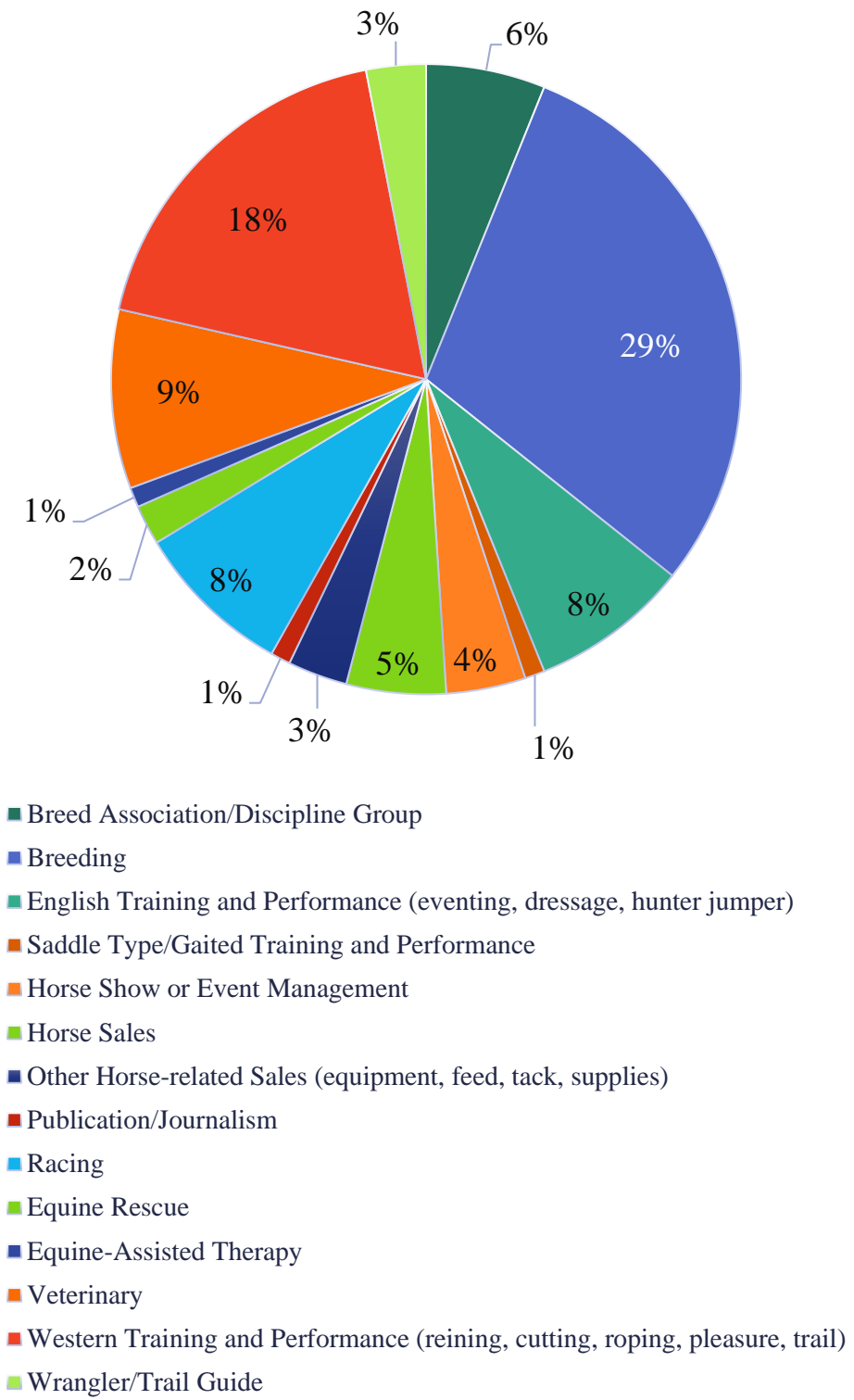


Figure 2: Response to the statement “which area of the industry was your internship most involved?” by individuals who had completed a horse-oriented internship (n=186).

Fifty-three percent of the respondents indicated that their internship was required by their academic institution to receive a degree, the other 47% indicated that an internship was not required by their institution. There was no effect of institutional requirements for an internship on the perceived value of the internship experience ( $P=0.76$ ) or whether respondents would recommend their internship ( $P=0.30$ ). When asked about prior horse experience, 60% indicated they had extensive horse experience, 37% indicated they had some experience, 2% had experience from their college or university, and 1% had no horse experience prior to their internship (Figure 3).

There was no difference in prior horse experience and perceived value of the internship experience ( $P=0.90$ ).

Regarding course credit, 61% of the respondents indicated that they received course credit for their internship and 39% did not receive course credit. Ninety-one percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 4) that their internship experience added to what they had learned in the classroom. Perceived internship value moderately correlated with participant agreement that the internship added to what they learned in the classroom ( $R=0.60$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ). Over two-thirds (71%) felt their academic program prepared them for their internship experience (Figure 5).

### **Internship**

Of the respondents, 77% indicated their internship was a paid position (figure 6), and 70% of respondents were provided housing by their internship program (Figure 7). Respondents were asked if the overall compensation (payment and/or housing) matched the amount of work that was expected to complete by their internship program.

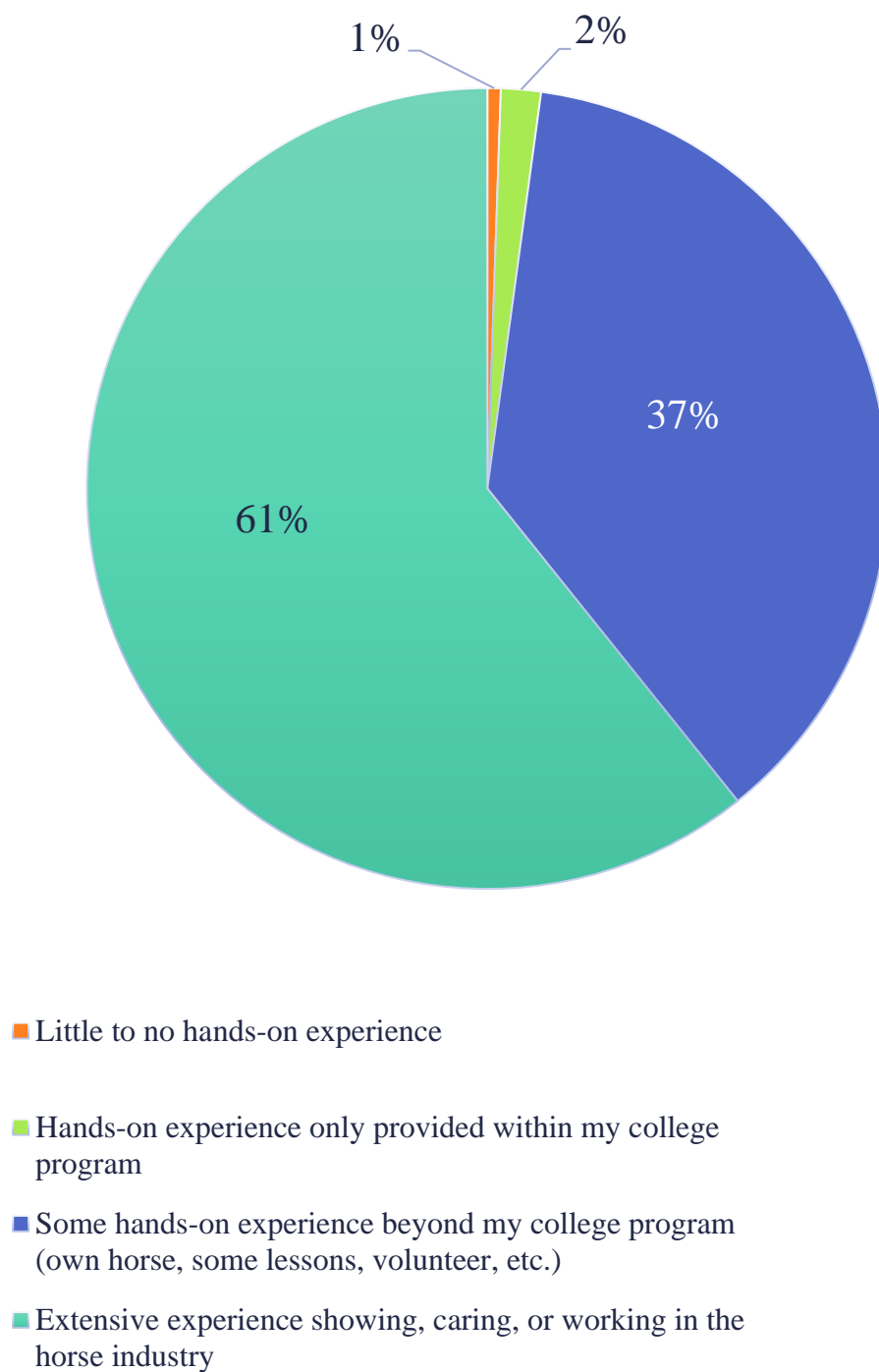


Figure 3: Respondents' (n=186) indication of horse experience prior to completing a horse-oriented internship.

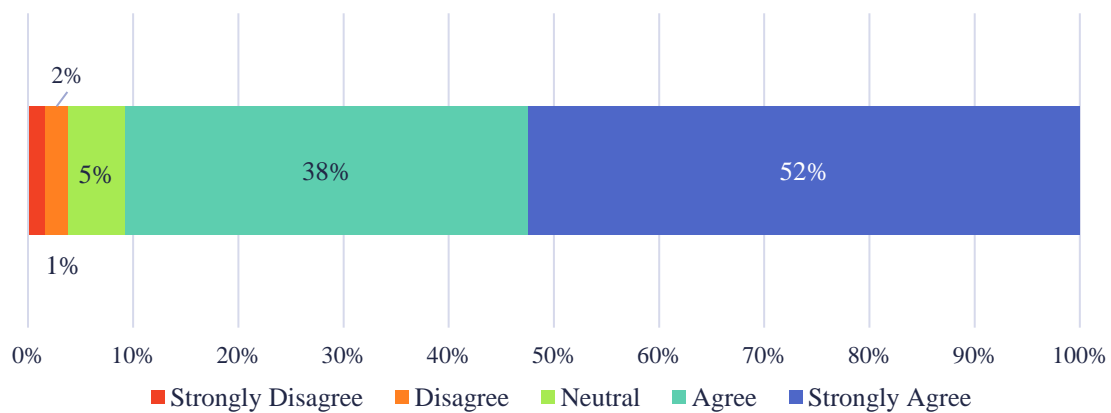


Figure 4: Response to the statement “my internship added to what I have learned in the classroom” by individuals who had completed a horse-oriented internship (n=186).

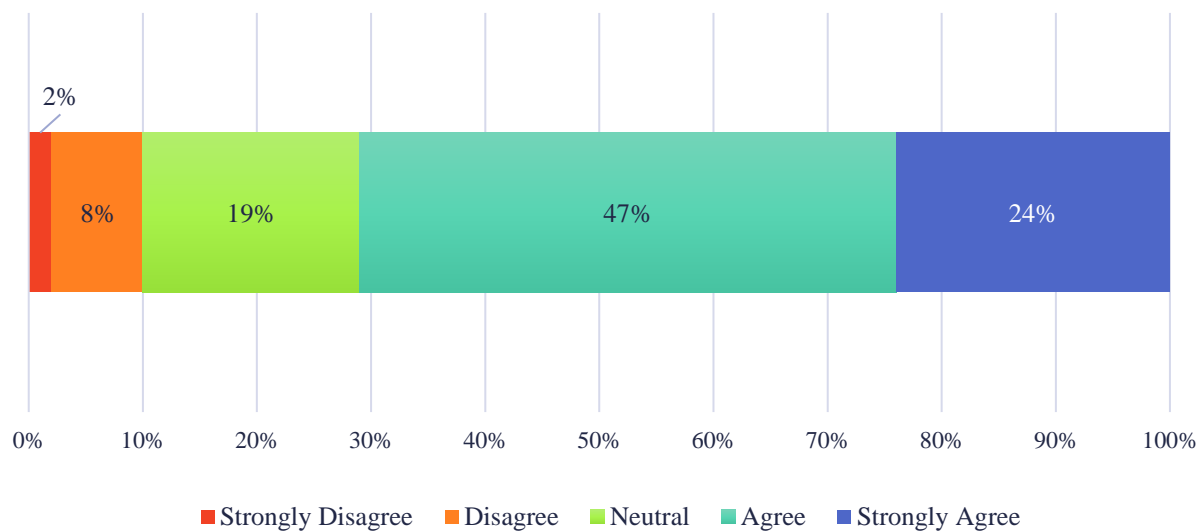


Figure 5: Response to the statement “my academic program helped me prepare for this internship experience” by individuals who had completed a horse-oriented internship (n=186).



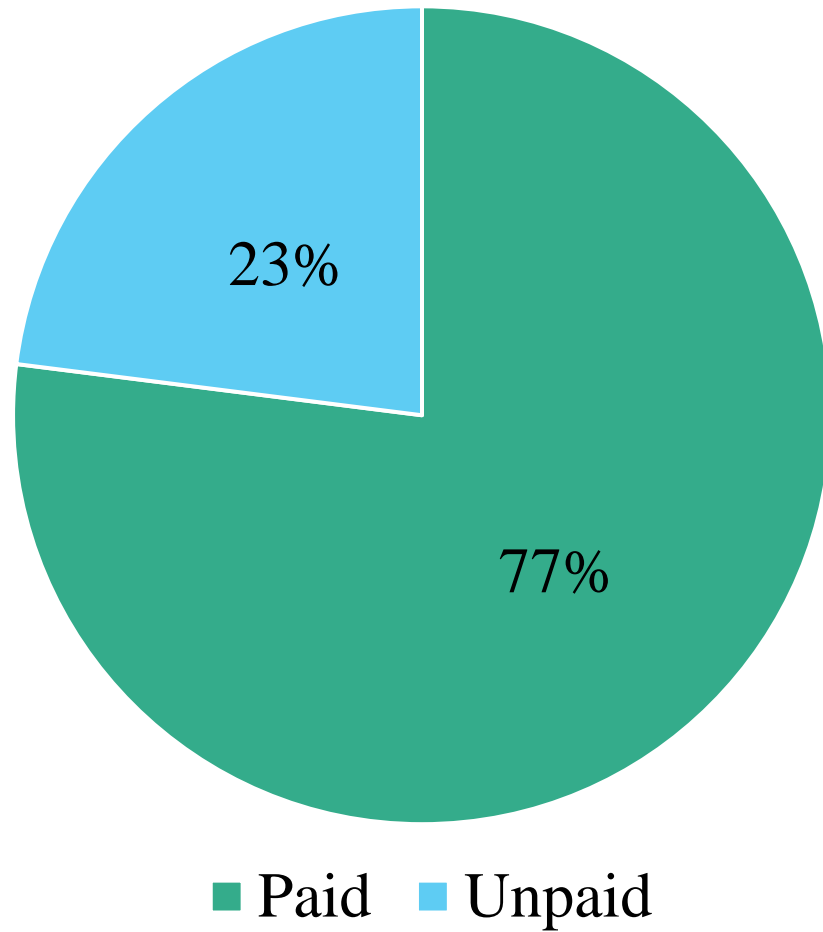


Figure 6: Respondents' (n=186) indication if their equine internship was paid or unpaid.

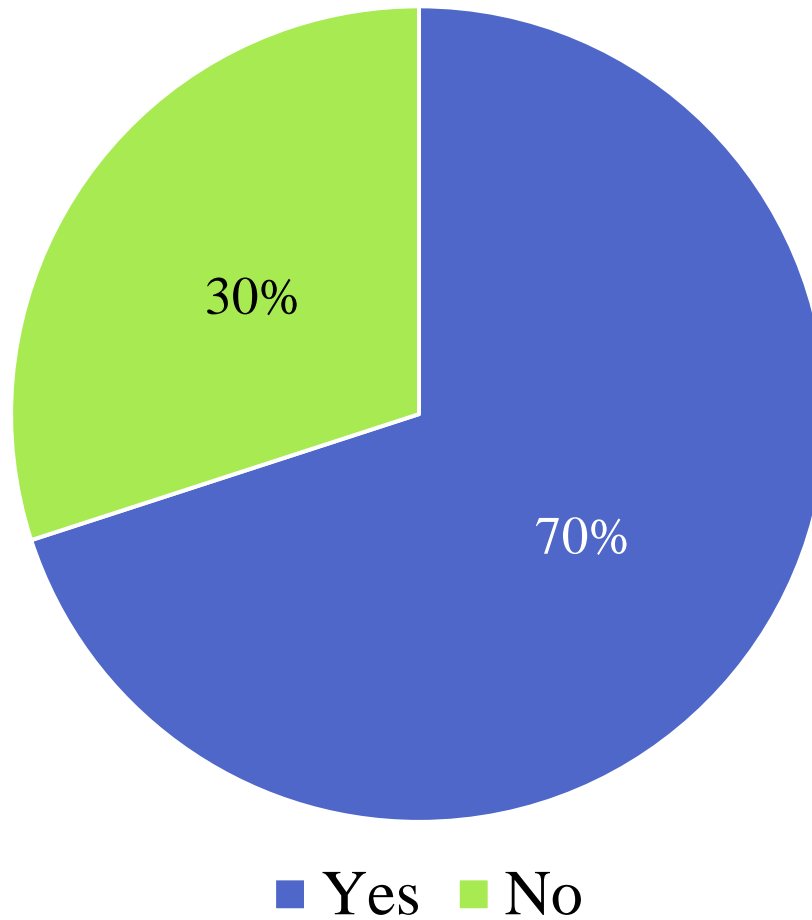


Figure 7: Respondents' (n=186) indication that housing was included or not included as part of their equine internship experience.

Fifty percent agreed or strongly agreed that compensation was equal, while 35% disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 8). Housing and compensation did not affect whether respondents would recommend their internship ( $P=0.61$ ); however, internship value tended to be rated higher when housing ( $P=0.075$ ) or compensation ( $P=0.057$ ) were included. To determine if location was a limitation for internship programs, respondents were asked if they moved to the internship location or stayed in their area of residence. Almost 80% of respondents moved for their internship, and 20% commuted from their home or school residence (Figure 9). Moving to or living at the internship location compared to commuting did not affect the perceived value of the internship experience or the likelihood of respondents recommending their internship ( $P=0.55$ ). The majority (97%) of respondents had completed the planned duration of their internship; however, a small number (2%) did not complete their internship and two respondents indicated their internship was still in progress. As to be expected, perceived internship value was rated higher by participants who completed the internship ( $4.5 \pm 0.6$ ) compared to those who did not finish ( $1.7 \pm 0.3$ ;  $P = 0.0001$ ).

### **Skill Acquisition**

Of the respondents, 87% indicated their internship was hands-on, meaning they worked with horses daily. When asked about skill acquisition (Figure 10 and Figure 11), 92% indicated they learned new equine-related skills, which was positively correlated with perceived value ( $R=0.49$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ). Of those equine-related skills, 81% agreed or strongly agreed they learned horse specific skills (e.g., handling, grooming and horse health).

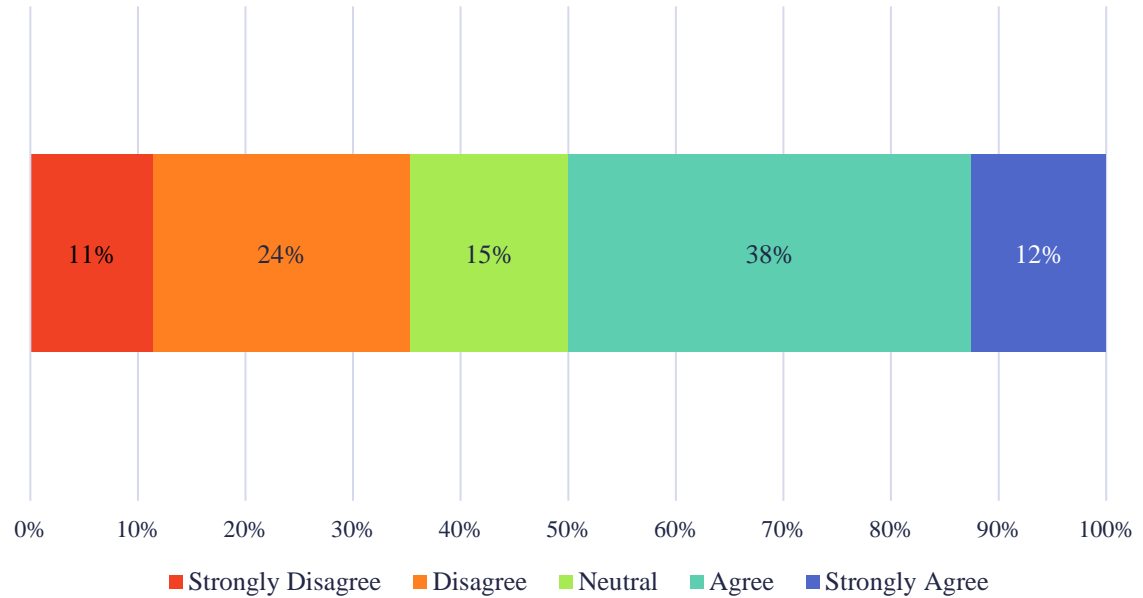


Figure 8: Response to the statement “the overall compensation (payment and/or housing) that I received for my internship experience matched the amount of work I was expected to complete.” by individuals who had completed a horse-oriented internship (n=186).

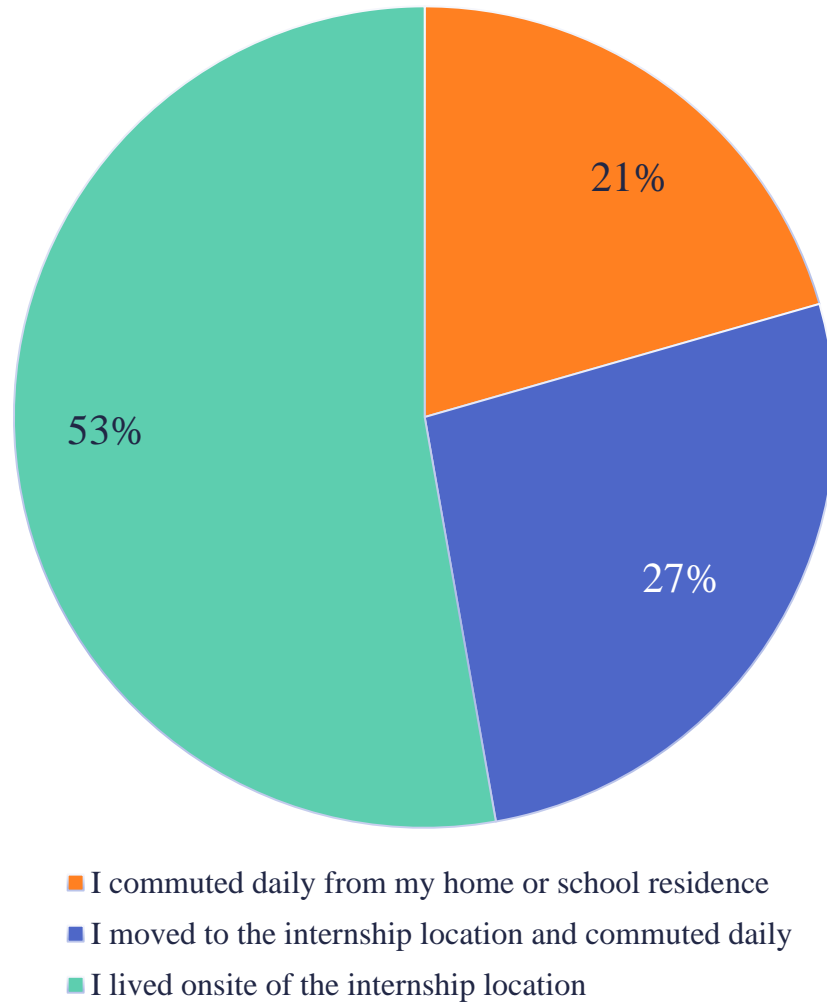


Figure 9: Respondents' (n=186) indication if they relocated their place of residence for the internship experience.

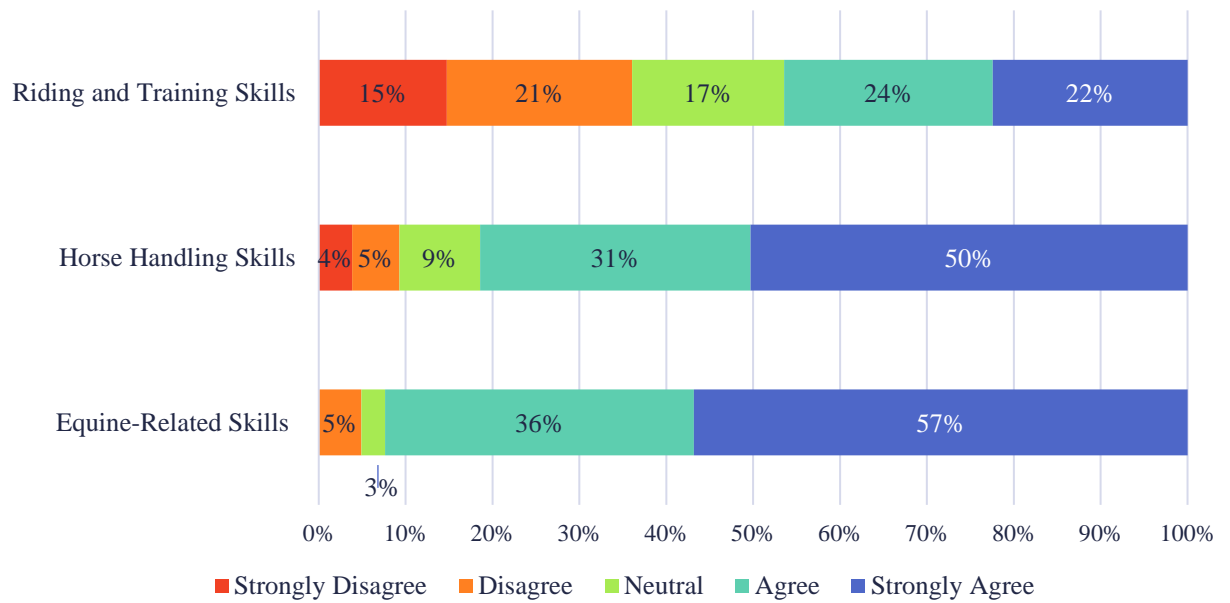


Figure 10: Respondents' (n=186) indication of equine skills gained during their equine internship.

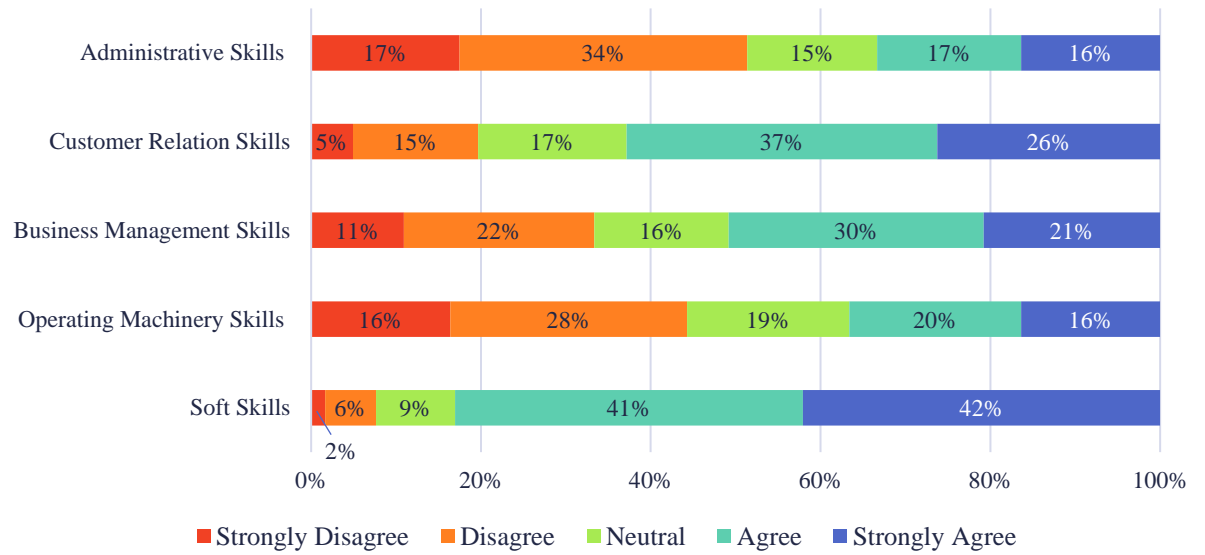


Figure 11: Respondents' (n=186) indication of skills gained during their equine internship.

While there was a broad range of agreement when asked about riding and training skills, 46% indicated they learned skills in this area. These horse handling and riding skills positively correlated with perceived value ( $R=0.29$ ;  $P<0.0001$  and  $R=0.25$ ;  $P<0.0001$ , respectively). Regarding other skills, 83% of respondents indicated they learned soft skills (e.g., communication, time management, and team work etc.) and respondents also reported gaining skills in business management (51%), customer relations (63%), and administration (33%). Sixty-seven percent of the respondents reported they often use the skills they learned during their internship in their current job.

### **Networking, Career Exploration, and Job Offers**

When asked about networking opportunities, 83% percent of the respondents indicated they were able to build valuable connections within the industry. Perceived value of the internship strongly correlated with networking opportunities ( $R=0.75$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ). Almost 80% reported they were able to explore different career options within the horse industry, and this also correlated with perceived internship value ( $R=0.51$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ).

When asked about job offers, 47% of the respondents indicated they were offered a job with that farm or company upon completion of the internship, and 50% of the respondents claimed that their internship helped them get a different job in their area of interest. Receiving a job offer from a farm or company different from the internship program was positively correlated with soft skills ( $R=0.27$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ), networking ( $R=0.48$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ), and career exploration ( $R=0.46$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ; Table 1).



Table 1: Correlations between receiving a job offer in participant's area of interest (different from internship firm or company) and internship experiences or skills gained (n=179).

<b>Different Job Offer X Internship Element</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Networking</b>	0.48	<0.0001
<b>Career Exploration</b>	0.46	<0.0001
<b>Soft Skills</b>	0.27	0.0002

### **Perceived Value**

Almost 80% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their internships positively influenced their desire to work in the horse industry, and 59% agreed that their internship positively influenced their desire to have a long-term career in the same area of the horse industry as their internship.

Desire to work in the horse industry positively correlated with gaining new equine related skills ( $R=0.36$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ), soft skills ( $R=0.47$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ), networking ( $R=0.60$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ), and career exploration ( $R=0.49$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ; Table 2). Overall, 91% of the respondents felt their internship was a valuable experience (Table 3), and 87% indicated they would recommend their internship to other students.

### **DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to collect perceptions of equine internships across various disciplines throughout the United States. Results show respondents participated in internships in various industry areas such as breeding and publication/journalism; therefore, this study is a good representation of equine internships available throughout the U.S.

Not all universities require an internship to receive a college degree in animal science or equine science, this may explain why the number of respondents in this study was low ( $n=186$ ). However, many previous studies examined only one internship program at a specific institution, such as criminal justice (Hiller et al., 2013), business (Gault et al., 2000), nursing (Hernandez et al., 2020; Starr and Conley, 2006) environmental health (Gerding et al., 2020), and public administration (Gabris and Mitchell, 1989).

Table 2: Correlations between Desire to Work in the Equine Industry and Internship Experiences or Skills Gained (n=179).

<b>Desire to Work in the Equine Industry X Internship Experiences and Skills Gained</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Networking</b>	0.60	<0.0001
<b>Career Exploration</b>	0.49	<0.0001
<b>Soft Skills</b>	0.47	<0.0001
<b>Equine-Related Skills</b>	0.36	<0.0001

Table 3. Correlations between perceived internship value and internship experiences or skills gained (n=179).

	<b>R</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>STRONG CORRELATIONS</b>		
Networking Opportunities	0.75	<0.0001
<b>MODERATE CORRELATIONS</b>		
Soft Skills	0.57	<0.0001
Career Exploration	0.51	<0.0001
Equine-Related Skills	0.49	<0.0001
<b>WEAK CORRELATIONS</b>		
Business Management Skills	0.37	<0.0001
Customer Relation Skills	0.36	<0.0001
Job offer from different farm or company	0.32	<0.0001
Horse Handling Skills	0.29	0.0001
Administration Skills	0.29	<0.0001
<b>VERY WEAK CORRELATIONS</b>		
Riding and Training Skills	0.25	0.0006
Operating Machinery Skills	0.25	0.0009
Job offer from internship farm or company	0.24	0.0016

While respondents to this survey were not asked their specific college or university, wide distribution of the survey through email and social media channels likely resulted in broad distribution across several programs. This is supported by the fact that respondents were nearly split on whether or not the internship was required by their program. Of the respondents, 47% indicated their internship was not required by their institution. This shows that students see value in internships as a means to prepare them for the workforce. This agrees with findings in a study that evaluated a criminal justice internship program, where 90% of respondents indicated that participating in an internship would help prepare them for a career in criminal justice, and 25% felt that their classwork alone had prepared them poorly for the real world (Hiller et al., 2013).

### **Prior Experience**

More students from urban backgrounds are pursuing an education in animal science (Dyer et al., 1996). This may suggest a lack of prior experience among students (Pratt-Phillips and Schmitt, 2010). In this current study, however, over half of respondents indicated they had extensive experience with horses, while some had hands-on experience beyond their college program (e.g., owning a horse or taking lessons), and less than 2% had hands-on experience only provided within their college program; only 1% of respondents had little to no hands-on experience. It would be interesting to examine if students with more experience are more likely to pursue internships than their less experienced counterparts in those programs where it is not a requirement. However, with this data, that remains impossible to determine as we are not aware of the number of students that did not participate nor their experience levels.

**Added to Classroom**

Internship programs can be very valuable to a student's education and it is believed that internships add to classroom learning (Long and Morgan, 2010). Respondents in this study indicated that their internship experience added to what they had learned in the classroom. This compares a previous study where equine internship participants indicated they could better relate information from their courses to the industry and apply the concepts and knowledge they learned in class (Anderson, 2015). In the current study, 71% of respondents felt their academic program adequately prepared them for their internship, and these findings are similar to Anderson (2015).

**Compensation**

Some believe that internships are exploitive and a way to provide cheap labor to companies in return for an easy "A" grade (Gault et al., 2000; O'Connor et. al., 2016); Conversely, D'abate et al. (2009), found that contextual factors such as paid versus unpaid and pay satisfaction did not influence internship satisfaction. This current study found that compensation did not affect whether respondents would recommend their internship, but perceived value was rated higher when compensation was included.

**Relocation to the Internship Site**

An often-perceived limitation to internship programs is that students may have to relocate or move to participate in the internship. This was not supported by the current study given that the majority of the respondents moved to a new location for their internship program. D'abate et al., (2009) also found that there was no significance between internship location and satisfaction, but suggested that because internships are temporary, students may be more willing to live away from home. Further research

should be done to examine if an internship experience away from home results in students being more willing to relocate for permanent positions.

### **Skills Acquisition**

As previously stated, students believe that internships are a good way to prepare for the workforce. One reason for this is internships help students acquire industry specific skills. This study found that 92% of respondents gained various new equine-related skills throughout their internship. When asked if their internship enhanced their skills in riding and training, business management, and administration, responses produced a more even distribution of agreement and disagreement. This variation could be attributed to the inclusion of a wide variety of industry areas and skills acquired by the participants in this study. For example, an intern working on a farm with horses daily may not acquire skills in administration, while an intern working for a breed association may acquire administrative skills but not horse handling skills.

Many studies agree that internships provide opportunities to learn new industry specific skills that benefit them in the workforce. Starr and Conley (2006) reported that participants had an increased confidence in patient care and nursing skills. Anderson (2015) also reported that new techniques and methods were learned during their equine internship. Conversely, Hernandez et al. (2020), believe that a barrier to nursing internships are that skills are too industry specific and may not translate from one area to another. In this study, 87% of respondents indicated they worked with horses daily, and it is believed that gaining or practicing horse handling skills can be beneficial to all disciplines in the horse industry.

### **Soft Skills**

Soft skills also make students marketable to employers (Gabris and Mitchell, 1989). Of respondents in this study, 83% indicated they developed soft skills such as communication and teamwork. The development of soft skills also positively correlated with perceived internship value. This agrees with other studies that found improvement in various soft skills (Gerding et al., 2020 Gault et al., 2000). One major benefit to being a nurse extern was “recognition as member of a team and that membership increases a students’ confidence and decreases their stress” (Starr and Conley, 2006). As previously stated, externships are not the same as an internship, but they allow similar experiential learning opportunities to gain soft skills and so are included in this discussion.

### **Networking**

The component that most strongly correlated with perceived value was networking ( $R=0.75$ ;  $P<0.0001$ ). Building and keeping valuable connections can be beneficial when searching for employment. This agrees with Hiller et al. (2013), who reported that students believed that criminal justice internships would enable them to network with individuals who could help them find a job and was a major reason for participating in an internship. In a study evaluating an environmental health internship program, interns were assigned a mentor to help advise them throughout their internship experience. The study indicated that 73% of the interns remained in contact with their mentor (Gerding et al., 2020).

### **Career exploration**

Internships also provide opportunities for students to explore different careers within an industry. In this study, 79% of respondents reported they were able to explore



different careers within the equine industry. This agrees with findings of Anderson (2015) where participants strongly agreed that the experience provided greater career exploration. Some internships encourage interns to work in different areas of the company to help students decide an area of interest (Gerding et al., 2020), but some interns may find that career exploration is overwhelming and hinders their ability to pick a specific career (Hiller et al., 2013). In the current study, career exploration was positively correlated with perceived value and job offers.

### **Job Offers**

The main goal of an internship is to find a career. In this study, almost 50% of the respondents indicated they were offered a job from the farm or company providing the internship. This is above the 30% reported in environmental health internships by Gerding et al. (2020) and the 29% reported agriculture internships by Peffer (2012); however, it can be closely related to what was reported in public administration internships by Gabris and Mitchell (1989) who found 47% of internship participants received job offers.

Respondents in this study also indicated they felt their internship played a role in getting a job offer from a different farm or company in their area of interest. This was positively correlated with gaining soft skills and equine-related skills. This agrees with other researchers that interns with direct industry experience have an increased chance of employment (Gault et al., 2000; Gabris and Mitchell, 1989).

Networking and career exploration were also positively correlated with receiving a job offer from a farm or company in the respondent's area of interest. Given the chance to meet industry professionals and explore new careers would better the chances of

receiving a job offer. This supports what Hiller et al. (2013), reported that students participate in internships because they feel they will meet people who will help them get a job.

Overall, almost all respondents in this study found their internship experience to be valuable and positively influenced their desire to work in the horse industry. This agrees with Peffer (2012), who reported 94% of respondents felt their internship was valuable to their future.

## **CONCLUSION**

Equine internships provide opportunities for students to gain both horse-industry specific skills and soft skills. Students also get exposure to things they have learned in the classroom and build on their current knowledge. Students are able to network and meet industry professionals that can help them pursue their career goals. Equine internships also provide opportunities to explore different careers in the horse industry and give students a broad understanding of potential careers. Respondents found their internships to be valuable, and that value correlated with compensation, skill acquisition, networking, and job offers.

This study indicates that students perceive their equine internships as valuable but further research would be advantageous. Research should be done to evaluate if there is a difference between those that participated in an equine internship and those that did not. Some differences that could be evaluated are job preparedness, time to job obtainment, pay rates, and retention rates. Further research could also evaluate how well academic programs prepare their students for equine internships. Almost 30% of respondents felt their academic institution did not prepare them for their internship. By evaluating what

internship programs are looking for in terms of an intern, academic institutions can have a better understanding of how prepare their students for these experiences. Further research should also examine what motivates students to move for an internship experience. Eighty percent of respondents in this study moved for their internship experience; evaluating what elements of internships motivate students to move would be beneficial to the equine industry.

As the equine industry grows, the need for industry professionals increases. Those with industry knowledge and experience will be highly valuable to employers and this study shows that equine internships can be a valuable tool in preparing people for positions within the equine industry.

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## **APPENDICIES**

**APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL**

**IRB**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
 Office of Research Compliance,  
 010A Sam Ingram Building,  
 2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd  
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129  
 FWA: 00005331/IRB Regn.. 0003571



### IRBN007 – EXEMPTION DETERMINATION NOTICE

Monday, December 14, 2020

*Protocol Title*                    **Outside the Classroom: An Evaluation of Equine Internships**  
*Protocol ID*                      **21-1081 2q**

*Principal Investigator*       **Holly Spooner (Faculty)**  
*Co-Investigators*              **Kaylee Layton**  
*Investigator Email(s)*        **holly.spooner@mtsu.edu**  
*Department/Affiliation*      **Agriculture**  
*Funding*                          **NONE**

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the EXEMPT review mechanism under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) within the research category (2) *Educational Tests, surveys, interviews or observations of public behavior (Qualtrics Survey)*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars of this protocol are shown below:

<i>IRB Action</i>	<b>EXEMPT from further IRB review***</b>		
<i>Date of Expiration</i>	<b>6/30/2022</b>	<i>Date of Approval:</i> 12/14/20	<i>Recent Amendment:</i> NONE
<i>Sample Size</i>	TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY (250)		
<i>Participant Pool</i>	<b>Healthy adults (18 or older) - Current &amp; Former MTSU Students</b>		
<i>Exceptions</i>	Online consent followed by internet-based survey using Qualtrics is permitted (Qualtrics links on file).		
<i>Type of Interaction</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Virtual/Remote/Online Interview/survey <input type="checkbox"/> In person or physical– Mandatory COVID-19 Management (refer next page)		
<i>Mandatory Restrictions</i>	<b>1. All restrictions for exemption apply.</b> <b>2. The participants must be 18 years or older.</b> <b>3. Mandatory ACTIVE informed consent. Identifiable information including, names, addresses, voice/video data, must not be obtained.</b> <b>4. NOT approved for in-person data collection.</b>		
<i>Approved IRB Templates</i>	<i>IRB Templates:</i> Recruitment Email and Online Informed Consent <i>Non-MTSU Templates:</i> Social Media Recruitment		
<i>Research Inducement</i>	NONE		
<i>Comments</i>	NONE		

\*\*\*Although this exemption determination allows above defined protocol from further IRB review, such as continuing review, MTSU IRB will continue to give regulatory oversight to ensure compliance.



**Summary of the Post-approval Requirements:** The PI must read and abide by the post-approval conditions (Refer “*Quick Links*” in the bottom):

- **Final Report:** The PI must close-out this protocol by submitting a final report before **6/30/2022**; if more time is needed to complete the data collection, the PI must request an extension by email. **REMINDERS WILL NOT BE SENT. Failure to close-out (or request extension) may result in penalties** including cancellation of the data collected using this protocol or withholding student diploma.
- **Protocol Amendments:** IRB approval must be obtained for all types of amendments, such as:
  - Addition/removal of subject population and sample size
  - Change in investigators
  - Changes to the research sites – appropriate permission letter(s) from may be needed
  - Alternation to funding
  - Amendments must be clearly described in an addendum request form
  - The proposed change must be consistent with the approved protocol and they must comply with exemption requirements
- **Reporting Adverse Events:** Research-related injuries to the participants and other events , such as, deviations & misconduct, must be reported within 48 hours of such events to [compliance@mtsu.edu](mailto:compliance@mtsu.edu)
- **Research Participant Compensation:** Compensation for research participation must be awarded as proposed in Chapter 6 of the Exempt protocol. The documentation of the monetary compensation must Appendix J and MUST NOT include protocol details when reporting to the MTSU Business Office.
- **COVID-19:** Regardless whether this study poses a threat to the participants or not, refer to the COVID-19 Management section for important information for the FA.

#### COVID-19 Management:

The PI must follow social distancing guidelines and other practices to avoid viral exposure to the participants and other workers when physical contact with the subjects is made during the study.

- The study must be stopped if a participant or an investigator should test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of the research interaction. This must be reported to the IRB as an “adverse event.”
- The MTSU’s “Return-to-work” questionnaire found in Pipeline must be filled by the investigators on the day of the research interaction prior to physical contact.
- PPE must be worn if the participant would be within 6 feet from the each other or with an investigator.
- Physical surfaces that will come in contact with the participants must be sanitized between use
- **PI’s Responsibility:** The PI is given the administrative authority to make emergency changes to protect the wellbeing of the participants and student researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the PI must notify the IRB after such changes have been made. The IRB will audit the changes at a later date and the PI will be instructed to carryout remedial measures if needed.

#### Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to implement minor and significant amendments that would not result in the cancellation of the protocol’s eligibility for exemption. **Only THREE procedural amendments will be entertained per year (changes like addition/removal of research personnel are not restricted by this rule).**

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

#### Post-approval IRB Actions:

The following actions are done subsequent to the approval of this protocol on request by the PI or on recommendation by the IRB or by both.

Date	IRB Action(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

#### Mandatory Data Storage Requirement:

All research-related records (signed consent forms, investigator training and etc.) must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application.

Institutional Review Board, MTSU

FWA: 00005331

IRB Registration. 0003571

The data must be stored for at least three (3) years after the study is closed. Additionally, the Tennessee State data retention requirement may apply (*refer "Quick Links" below for policy 129*). Subsequently, the data may be destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity of the research subjects. **The IRB reserves the right to modify/update the approval criteria or change/cancel the terms listed in this notice.** Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board  
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:

- Post-approval Responsibilities: <http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/FAQ/PostApprovalResponsibilities.php>
- Exemption Procedures: <https://mtsu.edu/irb/ExemptPaperWork.php>
- MTSU Policy 129: Records retention & Disposal: <https://www.mtsu.edu/policies/general/129.php>

**APPENDIX B: SURVEY**

1. For the purpose of this survey the term equine internship can be defined as a period of work experience offered by an equine organization that provides students with the opportunity to learn new practical skills, gain knowledge, and have networking opportunities in that part of the equine industry. This experience may be paid or completed on a voluntary basis. Based in this information, within the past 10 years have you participated in an equine internship or are you currently participating in an equine internship?
  - a. Yes
  - b. NoAll “no” respondents will be directed to the end of the survey
  
2. Have you received or are you pursuing a college level degree in animal science, equine science, or horse science?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
3. Which area of the industry was your internship most involved? (Pick one)
  - Western Training/Performance (Reining, cutting, roping, pleasure, trail)
  - English Training/Performance (eventing, dressage, hunter jumper)
  - Saddle type/gaited Training and performance
  - Wrangler/trail guide
  - Racing
  - Breeding
  - Horse Show or Event Management
  - Equine-Assisted Therapy
  - Equine Research
  - Publication/Journalism
  - Horse Sales
  - Other Horse-Related Sales (equipment, feed, tack, supplies)
  - Veterinary
  - Equine Rescue
  - Breed association/discipline group
  
4. Did you complete your internship?
  - a. Yes
  - b. My internship is still in progress
  - c. No
  
5. Was your internship required for your degree?
  - a. Yes

- b. No
6. Did you receive course credit for your internship?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
7. Was your internship paid or unpaid?
- a. Paid
  - b. Unpaid
8. Was housing provided as a part of the internship?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
9. The overall compensation (payment and/or housing) that I received for my internship experience matched the amount of work I was expected to complete.
- 1 Strongly Disagree
  - 2 Disagree
  - 3 Neutral
  - 4 Agree
  - 5 Strongly Agree
10. For the duration of my internship I \_\_\_\_\_:
- a. Commuted daily from my home or school residence
  - b. Moved to the internship location and commuted daily
  - c. Lived onsite of internship location
11. My internship was hands on, meaning I worked directly with the horses daily.
- 1 Strongly Disagree
  - 2 Disagree
  - 3 Neutral
  - 4 Agree
  - 5 Strongly Agree
12. Prior to my internship experience my horse experience is/was best described as...
- a. Little to no hands-on horse experience
  - b. Hands on experience only provided within my college program
  - c. Some hands-on experience beyond my college program (own horse, some lessons, volunteer etc.)
  - d. Extensive experience showing, caring, or working in the horse industry
13. My internship experience added to what I have learned in the classroom.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

14. My academic program helped me prepare for this internship experience.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

15. I learned new equine related skills during my internship.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

16. I learned new non-equine related skills (communication, time management, teamwork etc.) during my internship.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

17. I gained horse handling, grooming, and horse health skills during my internship

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

18. I gained riding/training skills during my internship

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

19. I gained skills operating machinery (tractor, driving a horse trailer, etc.)

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

20. I gained business management skills during my internship

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

21. I gained customer relation skills during my internship.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

22. I gained administrative skills during my internship (computer software, office duties, etc.) during my internship

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

23. I often use the skills I learned during my internship in my current job.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

24. My internship provided opportunities for me to network and build valuable connections.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

25. My internship provided me with greater career exploration.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

26. My internship positively influenced my desire to work in the horse industry.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

27. My internship positively influenced my desire to have a long-term career in the same area of the horse industry as my internship.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

28. My internship resulted in a job offer with that farm or company upon completion

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

29. My internship helped me to get a different job offer in my area of interest.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

30. Overall, my internship experience was valuable.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree

31. I would recommend future students to complete an internship like mine.

- 1 Strongly Disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly Agree