

Voices in the Hall: Alumni Perspectives on the Value of Networking

MELISSA TURNER

Kansas State University

GREGORY LINDSTEADT

Missouri Western State University

Internships build lasting opportunities for students and provide necessary partnerships between higher education and employers. This study utilizes qualitative data extracted from a survey of alumni from one Midwestern university to examine student employment and educational satisfaction. Phone and internet interviews were conducted to ascertain alumni views on: Employment, Continuing Education, Applied Learning, and Advisement (n = 125). Alumni advice clearly expressed to current students and faculty members the necessity of “networking” with those in the field prior to students completing the degree. Linking current students to those in the field, primarily through internships, was viewed by alumni as essential to developing opportunities for students to network and gain access to a challenging job market.

If given the opportunity, what advice would you give students currently in college to help them succeed? This is a question that was asked of alumni in order to examine the outcomes of their educational experience. One alumnus communicates this piece of advice to students:

I worked as a waitress throughout my four year degree. When I graduated I started going on interviews and they wanted someone who had some experience. I thought just having my degree would be OK (Alumni Interview, #25).

It is interesting that her “data” is a sample group of one—absent of national trend data, educational support or correlation coefficients—but the advice carries weight and meaning to students, instructors and curriculum designers. It provides a clear roadmap to these parties if successful completion of a degree is to transpire into entry-level field work.

It is somewhat confounding disciplines that so often make use of “research methods” as a typical core class (Southerland, 2002) fail to provide insight on the implications and consequences of growing classrooms (Carlan, 2007; Castellano & Schafer, 2005; Lytle & Travis, 2008; Sundt, 2010). For example, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) identifies over 38,000 Bachelor degrees from over 900 institutions that were awarded in 2009 alone in Criminal Justice. Add an additional 5,000 students earning a degree in Criminology and the popularity of this one educational program becomes clear. These growing numbers are supported by higher education administrators, but alumni report the competition for jobs in the field is becoming an increasingly difficult roadblock to maneuver to reach the successful outcome of employment after earning a degree. Of the 125 recent (within 5 years) alumni interviewed in this study, only about half (62 of 125) reported current employment in the field of criminal justice (not unlike Carlan’s (1999) findings). Specifically the phrases “current job market,” “job availability” and “the economy” were reported to interviewers by over 20% of alumni surveyed as key roadblocks for employment in the field. It is becoming increasingly evident that building the best foundation for student success in their chosen field cannot happen solely in the traditional classroom.

This phenomenon is not confined to what are typically considered the vocational academic programs (nursing, education, criminal justice). Liberal arts majors remain hampered by the inability to provide potential employers evidence of their ability to transfer and test their knowledge to what is needed on the jobsite (Brooks, 2009; Carlin, 2002; O’Neill, 2010). Simply relying on the employers consenting to the exchange rate of an “A” in a required major’s class will indicate the desired skills sought in the private sector is too risky for academic programs to assume. Providing opportunities to network and demonstrate

the value of an academic program to the public sector will accumulate into the capital necessary for alumni success (Brooks, 2009; Mora, Garcia-Aracil, & Vila, 2007).

All in all, we do not seem to know that much about the results of student learning in the myriad of programs that are provided in higher education (Moriarty, 2006). In sum, the classrooms may be full, but what is missing is educational impact in areas of opportunity and entrance into a chosen field. The sense of ease felt when believing an educator’s responsibility to the student ends at graduation promotes a lack of concern regarding outcome measures. Unfortunately, little research has been conducted focusing on graduates from the United States institutions of higher education. Job satisfaction has simply been used as a proxy for educational satisfaction in those fields that require specific educational degrees. The examination of the literature did not uncover any comprehensive efforts in the United States to examine alumni opinions of their educational experiences. The European University System, on the other hand, has attempted at least one such comprehensive study of recent graduates to address issues related to specific discipline, university and program educational satisfaction. The *Careers after Higher Education: A European Research Survey* (CHEERS) surveyed alumni in nine different countries four years after graduation (<http://www.uni-kassel.de/incher/cheers/index.ghk>; Mora, Vila, & Garcia-Aracil, 2005). These alumni were asked their perspectives on a wide range of issues, including the value and satisfaction with their degree program. The individual’s expectation in relation to the necessary education their specific field requires has consistently been found to predict satisfaction with the selected educational program (Garcia-Aracil, 2009; Mora, et al., 2005). Furthermore, graduates who held a degree in their respective field identified a 17% higher satisfaction with their degree program than those alumni who were not employed in a field relative to their program of study (Mora et al., 2005).

Similar attempts to orchestrate a comprehensive assessment of graduates, such as those by *U.S. News and World Report*, have failed to reach the literature of academia (U.S. News and World Report, 2011). The failure to uncover a comprehensive assessment of U.S. colleges and university graduates is not at all surprising. First, U.S. colleges and universities have prided themselves on where they *best fit* in the arena of higher education. This compartmentalization of private and public, liberal arts and professional, or research and philosophy provides a built in appeal process to any examination of their value. Alumni reviews, if conducted, have been based in a single individual program, resulting in a failure to address the current principles for standardized quantitative review. Next, if alumni surveys are distributed they are usually done so in a passive manner; such as in the form of a mass mailing, or left on a campus website for browsers to find. These surveys are more often than not closed Likert-style questions and provide little more than broad summaries of educational and vocational difficulties in a chosen field (Zydzianaite, 2007). Finally, alumni are a very transient group. This is usually due to the pursuit of new opportunities, making them simply difficult to track and find.

AUTHOR NOTE: Melissa Turner, College of Human Ecology, Youth Development Program, Kansas State University. Gregory Lindsteadt, Department of Criminal Justice, Legal Studies, and Social Work, Missouri Western State University. The research for this article was supported in part by a grant from the Missouri Western State University Foundation Office. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Gregory Lindsteadt, Department of Criminal Justice, Legal Studies, and Social Work, 204 Wilson Hall, Missouri Western State University, 4525 Downs Dr., St. Joseph, MO 64507. E-mail: glindsteadt@missouriwestern.edu or mturner@k-state.edu

Assessment in U.S. colleges and universities has made use of what is convenient—meaning the current student body. The *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE) addresses current student opinions regarding their experiences in higher education and their perceived needs. These surveys currently occur at over 750 universities every two years and involve over 400,000 student and faculty. Relative to this study, the 2007 NSSE examined specifically student opinions of *Experiential Learning Experiences* and *High Impact Models of Learning*.

Certainly national surveys, such as the NSSE, are useful for obtaining a grasp of classroom demographics, students' wants and desires—but in general these students offer a limited, single-direction overview of the program and can only guess at the predicted usefulness of their present course of action. The reliance on those guiding them (academic advisor, department curriculum chair, or instructor) remains a leap of faith—due to a relatively small percent of students at this point having field experience in their selected educational field.

...work with your instructors, get experience, anything to get more knowledge and be able to communicate that information... (Alumni Interview, #165).

This level of faith should encourage educators to develop the best possible resources necessary to build success for students in their area of interest. As Birzer and Palmiotto (2002) identify, an educator's role is not to simply fill the jobs, but create a student who has the ability to converse in the discussion unique to a discipline. This ability to enter one's field of choice with adequate skills has been identified in European graduate studies as a prime indicator of educational satisfaction (Garcia-Aracil, 2009).

METHODOLOGY DESCRIPTION

Making use of qualitative analysis is not easy, and when conclusions are drawn they are susceptible to claims of bias in the interpretation (Fink, 2000). However, by considering potential benefits of implementing an assessment with an interview serving as the foundation, it could make the roadblocks seem slightly less risky. True, this is a very intrusive method, but interviews fit exceptionally well in many fields and it is somewhat surprising interviews are not supported more passionately in the literature. Essentially, we communicate reasons and experiences to help make sense of them (Shank, 2002). By effectively utilizing exchanges with alumni (participants) additional field-tested insights can be actively brought forward from individual responses.

For example, balancing what is learned conceptually regarding a vague phenomenon such as "networking" can build understanding of the input and timing necessary to achieve a student's goals. Alumni can share presorted understanding of their experience and provide the means to an end in context for students and educators. These narratives are built in the present but are formulated and sorted based on the ap-

plication of experience (Jacobs, Leach, & Spencer, 2010). Sometimes, as Volkwein (2010) discusses, it takes time for the alumni to put their education and career in perspective. Alumni offer this unique perspective on curriculum in the current field that simply cannot be gleaned by faculty or student (Terkla & Armstrong, 1999).

SURVEY DISTRIBUTION

The survey interview was administered to recent alumni of one Criminal Justice Department. The purpose of this study was two-fold: to develop contact with local alumni and to capture information on the impact of recent curriculum changes. The alumni group assessed was limited to those graduating with a four-year Bachelor of Science degree from the Criminal Justice Department between the years of 2005-2010. Phone interviews ($n = 89$) typically lasted about 20 minutes, but ranged from 10 minutes to over an hour. In the interviewer's opening statement, three items were clarified: (a) there would be no request made for donations or solicitation of funds; (b) the voluntary nature and the purpose of the study; and (c) an offer of remuneration (shirt with department's alumni logo).

The process of the interview determined three attempts to reach the alumni would be made by interviewers. Despite this group of alumni being considered more recent, as expected, contacting these alumni was a difficult task. University, department, and public listings of contact information were utilized, but also investigative techniques using social network sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, as well as electronic search engines were utilized.

Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic and institutional information for those alumni surveyed. Overall, there were 274 graduates eligible for this study. Of these graduates 152 (55.5% find rate) were contacted directly and 125 (45.6%/82.2%) of those agreed to participate and provided usable data. The survey was developed by department faculty as a part of the Criminal Justice Department review. The survey consisted of both closed (Likert-type) and open response interview questions. Institutional data was utilized to examine the sample surveyed compared to the population of graduates from this department. The sample of those alumni participating compared to those not participating in the survey showed no significant difference on the demographic and institutional variables: gender, race, GPA, and ACT entrance scores. There was a significant difference found between the two groups in age ($t(271) = 2.21, p = .028$), with those interviewed found to be slightly younger. Based on these analyses, we determined the two groups did not differ significantly and generalizations could be made to the full group of alumni from this particular department.

Table 2 provides a summary of employment and participation in higher education (secondary) for interviewed alumni. Interestingly, just below half of all interviewed stated they were currently employed in the Criminal Justice or Legal field (49.6%); with 79.0% of these employed in the particular emphasis of their major. A total of 22.4% were

Table 1. Sample Characteristics of Those Interviewed

Variable	respondents (%)	non-respondents (%)
Gender		
Female	70 (56%)	97 (65.1%)
Male	55 (44%)	52 (34.9%)
Race		
White	101 (82.1%)	126 (84.6%)
Not White	22 (17.9%)	23 (15.4%)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Age at Graduation:			
Respondents	25.30	6.56	21-69 (48 years)
Non-respondents	27.17	7.28	21-61 (40 years)
GPA (2.0 required on 4.0 scale)			
Respondents	3.02	.42	2.03-3.95 (1.92)
Non-Respondents	2.97	.46	2.13-4.0 (1.87)
ACT			
Respondents (<i>n</i> = 103)	18.93	3.56	9-27 (18)
Non-Respondents (<i>n</i> = 121)	18.98	3.76	5-28 (23)

Note: *n* = 125. The variable representing 'race' was transformed to a dichotomous measure due to the high percentage of those alumni who were Caucasian. ACT testing is not required for students at this particular university.

currently or had participated in an educational program higher than a Bachelor of Science.

The interview was built specifically into the survey instrument as the method of delivery to alumni to encourage interaction between interviewer (student researcher) and interviewee (alumni). Questions were prefaced with "do you have advice to current students in the department" on topics such as employment, continuing higher education, and general advice on what to be doing while going to school to increase their opportunities after earning their degree? The primary method for delivery of this instrument was via telephone, to better allow interviewers the opportunity to probe, branch and build personal rapport with the alumni. In addition, electronic survey software (Remark Web Survey 4) that allows branching based on the subjects' response and personal interviews was utilized.

Table 2. Employment and Educational Characteristics of Those Interviewed

Variable	respondents (%)
Employment	
Employed	107 (85.6%)
Not employed	18 (14.4%)
Employment Vocation (<i>n</i> = 107 employed)	
Employed in CJ or LS	62 (49.6%)
Employed not in CJ or LS	45 (36.0%)
Employment (<i>n</i> = 62 employed in CJ or LS)	
Employed in CJ or LS Emphasis	49 (79.0%)
Secondary Higher Education	
Participated(ing)	28 (22.4%)
Have plans to participate in higher education (<i>n</i> = 103)*	
Yes	40 (38.9%)
No	28 (27.2%)
Uncertain at this time	31 (30.1%)
Missing or in a program	4 (03.9%)

*Note: Six alumni reported beginning a secondary level of higher education program, but not completing. Of these, five alumni identified they did not plan to return (No) and one identified they did plan to return (Yes).

RESULTS

Discussions with these graduates were directed to identify and feed information to students and faculty on how best to navigate the four-year degree as a method of building a career. The study found that whether or not the alumni was employed in the criminal justice or legal fields or not, a consistent and unified voice expressed to interviewers that the value of higher education should not be overrated when seeking employment.

To compete you have to get the experience somewhere (Alumni Interview, #119).

Get involved in any and all programs associated with the field of interest. This would help to show the nature of work and details with the career...start researching for jobs to get an idea of requirements (Alumni Interview, #36).

The literature paints a similar picture of what it is employers in the field of criminal justice seek. Creton and Clements (2010) address tension that is “clearly evident” (p. 72) between academia and the criminal justice field. They view the policing literature as particularly hostile with an air of obvious mistrust. But the bias flows both ways, as Heslop (2010) found the complete dismissal of the value of practical experience in some academic programs (Castellano & Schafer, 2005; Jacobs et al., 2010).

Likely most practitioners and academics fall somewhere between, but walking the line of becoming the professional from inside the classroom is indeed a trying experience for those without contacts. The advice provided by alumni indicated an overwhelming pull towards the importance of networking as a major contributor to future successes. One alumnus stated:

Getting a job is all about networking and selling yourself. People that actively seek employment will always be able to find it; however, people that passively seek employment will always struggle to find work. For example, I got a job being a law clerk with my firm by taking a day off of school knocking on doors and telling any firm that would listen that I needed a job and that I would be a good fit for their firm. This worked and now I work as an attorney at the same firm about two and a half years later (Alumni Interview, #26).

It is this important emphasis alumni themselves have placed on networking, which should be assessed by academic programs. Findings from NSSE (2007) concur, identifying how active students correlate field activities with educational success before they graduate. The fact of increasing financial demands on universities and the competitiveness in higher education markets make unemployment rates of graduates one of the biggest measurable performance indicators of institutional quality. Job-seekers not only report that they initially heard about their present jobs through informal ties, but also that social contacts actively influenced the hiring process (Esperanca, Jaume, Enric, & Dolors, 2000; Higdon, 2004). Difficulties in attaining and maintaining employment cause alumni to rethink the true value of their educational experience and foster dissatisfaction with both university and their education. This may have a cumulative impact if the graduate views they were over- or under-prepared for their career choice (Garcia-Aracil, 2009).

NETWORKING

So this begs the question, what does the term “networking” actually mean to alumni?

I think that it is most important to have the experience, as well as to complete the degree. There are opportunities out there for employment if one does not obtain a four-year degree. However,

the opportunity for advancement in these fields may lack. In the criminal justice field there, in my opinion, will always be some form of employment, but experience is key. For example, in my search for employment, many occupations required me to have many years of experience. Thankfully, I did participate in the internship/practicum opportunities (Alumni Interview, #74).

This individual indicated a general dictionary definition applied to this aspect of networking, but also viewed a pattern based in the process of networking for jobs in this particular field; more specifically, the idea of internships as a key networking opportunity for those needing access to the field. *Not having job experience* (Alumni Interview, #289), *Needing to find a way to get your foot in the door* (Alumni Interview, #104) and *Need experience in a related field* (Alumni Interview, #65) were among the comments that identified the difficulties for students entering the field. Key to this input was the fact that experience was identified by so many graduates as a primary desire of employers.

Get yourself out there in the community. Use your internship for building relationships with possible employers (Alumni Interview, #4).

Learn all you can now—my internship turned into a job for me (Alumni Interview, #9).

When examining current job markets we find graduates are not simply competing against other graduates for entry-level work, but also against those with years of experiences due to downsizing and layoffs (Higdon, 2004). Building in opportunities for students to have work-place experience, coupled with an education, allows students to compete in even low employment market periods (Mora et al., 2005).

BUILDING CAREER SATISFACTION

Career satisfaction is indeed a tricky endeavor to measure. For educational programs, this can be misinterpreted as dissatisfaction with a degree that resulted in the alumni's current position. Evidence exists that demonstrates degree satisfaction will trend downward with longer career experience (O'Neill, 2010). Graduates surveyed in this particular study discussed the “*poor salary*” “*difficult hours*” and “*paperwork*” that made their work difficult. When accompanied with the “*high stress*” involved in the criminal justice and legal fields, it was evident they were providing a warning to interviewers and students that the criminal justice field should not be entered without study and forethought. Providing resources to students to be better prepared for the challenges they will face may prevent these unhappy alumni from voicing their concerns to educational program administrators or potential students and allow them to make positive recommendations to the department. In fact, many of alumni advised students to participate

in more than one internship experience and to seek out opportunities to build up their resume as well as to network while still in school.

I would tell them to make contacts with several agencies during the career fairs that are held at... for possible practicums and internships. I would also tell them to do their practicum in one field in criminal justice and their internship in another field in criminal justice. I think it's a great idea to open themselves up to just more than career in the criminal justice field and realize the possibilities out there. (Alumni Interview, #39).

The NSSE (2007) findings would agree that more experiential learning materials spread throughout the student's career will enhance student well-being and perceptions of educational value, even prior to graduation.

Career satisfaction comes not only from workplace experience, whether it be prior work experience or an internship experience, but also from feeling confident in the tasks at hand based on having experience in that particular field. In the review of CHEERS data, Garcia-Aracil (2009) noted a well-organized program of higher education developed stronger professional competencies. As this alumnus reflects:

Also, really understand all that you are learning now, language, terms and processes....because you do have to know them and sometimes you look silly when you don't know something that your employer expects (Alumni Interview, #70).

Along with the ability to communicate in person, alumni specifically advised the necessity of being able to communicate well in writing to stand out in the field: *Learn to become a better writer* (Alumni Interview, #69), *practice your writing skills and write lots of papers* (Alumni Interview, #73) and *work on written skills—they are important* (Alumni Interview, #114). Confidence in their ability to work within the field provides enhanced opportunities for advancement earlier in the professional's career. Satisfied alumni should be serving as advocates for the programs that provided this head start, not lamenting on the cost of a higher education that failed to supply them with the tools to succeed (O'Neill, 2010).

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Internships were only one way alumni defined *networking* opportunities. Becoming involved in student organizations and community service (volunteer) opportunities were also supported in discussions. One alumnus stated:

Encourage undergraduates to get involved in community service... even if you don't plan to stay in your current location, use it as a stepping stone. Be involved... (Alumni Interview, #79).

Several of the alumni supported this in theory, but when asked if they actually did this the majority said they "were not able to but wish they could have." The reasons varied but were very descriptive of the current student body—which includes a fairly large percentage of non-traditional students (25%). Alumni did not simply report they refused to participate; they reported reasons such as the number of children they had at home or the financial responsibilities they shared which prevented participation. Graduates desired to have more "collaboration with teachers, besides in class," "attend conferences," or to participate in university sponsored "study abroad."

Get involved in organizations and volunteer to broaden outlook on what it is you want to do with your career and it teaches you how to be a leader and how to react to change. (Alumni Interview, #15).

Any professional or academic conference would be beneficial for a well-rounded resume (Alumni Interview, #95).

Reality forces the admission that programs cannot be all inclusive of individual needs—but this expressed alumni regret should not be forgotten by those designing these programs. Nearly 37% of alumni identified they lacked time to participate in these types of activities due to work or family commitments. Only 5% identified they were unaware of such activities—while the remainder were content with their decisions—whether they participated or not.

EDUCATORS AND INSTITUTIONS

If the faculty would be more involved in either providing guidance or providing opportunities for students to gain insight into the field, it would greatly improve the percentage of graduates earning positions in the field directly out of school (Alumni Interview, #76).

This particular alumnus provided a summary of the expectations of faculty involved in building the bridges between the field and education. Educators are to actively pursue and develop methods and curriculum that assist in setting success post-graduation concurrently with the student earning their degree. The importance placed on this advice should be high; these alumni provide a clear direction for curriculum designers, practitioners and the student by discussing there is more to a student's education and experience than simply a classroom and one applied learning experience. Providing more avenues of applied learning for students is clearly desired to give students the most experience before entering the field or pursuing graduate school. These types of collaborative efforts can be viewed clearly in hindsight by the alumni—and they were indeed passionate regarding the impact of these efforts. Alumni report the necessity for faculty to be more actively involved in

the students' education, making themselves more available for students to meet with, and to help provide them with opportunities to develop their resume and be prepared for the field.

Stichman and Farkas (2005) identify the necessity of field placements for future professionals, but also the necessity of preparation for students. Buerger (2004) also cites the importance of utilizing collaborations with professionals in the field to teach some of the thornier sides of social justice. Maintaining links with the community practitioners will result in increased access to desired professions and professionals for students. This may be the biggest challenge for educators: to stay up to date with the changing policies and procedures in the vocational field while providing a strong curriculum. To prepare students to interact properly in the field, faculty must be aware of the details of the environment where the student will be placed. We often view this a responsibility of the student or "they will learn it for themselves" when they get out there (Stichman & Farkas, 2005, p. 148; Bailey, Hughes, & Moore, 2004; Hughes, Moore, & Bailey, 1999). In essence, alumni recommend faculty to take a more aggressive role in setting students up for success, assisting in accomplishing their post-graduation goals.

Another way for faculty to take a more involved approach would be to better relate the applied learning experience back into the classroom. The experience alone is effective, but a well-organized educational experience, coupled with field work in one's chosen vocation combine to make a satisfied graduate (Garcia-Aracil, 2009; Mora et al., 2007). These two aspects of teaching and learning are not opposing, but directly related to one another. Learning skills to be applied in the field will indeed make a more *efficient worker*; but someone who can take the applied learning experience and relate it back to what they learned in the classroom makes a stronger, well-rounded candidate for agencies.

Start researching what agencies are looking for before you graduate and apply. The main problem I ran into was not knowing what the agencies were looking for specifically (Alumni Interview, #25).

Lindsteadt and Williams-Decker (2009) identified, "Helping students process and develop as they experience their chosen field should be the essence of a true applied learning experience, as well as a lecture hall" (p.76). Based on these data, alumni are identifying how essential it is educators serve as the student link to more applied learning experiences in their classroom. Internships are a part of applied learning that allows the student to apply classroom knowledge with hands-on experience, as well as bring the work experience back to the classroom and connect it to what is being learned (Hirschinger-Blank & Markowitz, 2006).

Be sure to gain work experience as soon as possible and start internships in the beginning stages of your college career (Alumni Interview, #78).

Use faculty for ideas of where to intern and how to get the most of your experience in the field to make sure of the area you want to go into (Alumni Interview, #22)

Although internships are supposed to apply classroom knowledge into work experience, they typically do not involve professor-student contact. This limits the application of academics to experience; however, these internships occur primarily during a student's last year in school, enabling them to focus more so on obtaining a job after graduation, rather than applying the experience to academics (NSEE, 2007; Penn, 2003). Early introduction to internship opportunities was suggested by several alumni to assist in juxtaposing classroom and field experience. Utilizing internships as a networking opportunity for students gives them the time and place to ask questions, show agencies their work ethic and to build up a repertoire of contacts for when they graduate and begin looking for a job in the field. This is also a way for students to build their resume to show they have some experience in the field when they apply.

FINAL DISCUSSION

Students, faculty, and professionals all have a stake in building networking opportunities between higher education and the professional field. As identified by those who have field-tested the degree experience by transitioning into the job market, networking was viewed as a base ingredient to this final product. Alumni could identify with the current job market which the undergraduate student was soon to face and believed that a degree would not stand alone, or would be simply insufficient for a successful transition into the field. This advice was not theoretical; it was forged on the anvils of their recent experience. Networking is the key to building these opportunities for students, but well-planned curriculum is necessary to accomplish this endeavor.

Although rather limited, available alumni surveys from European educational programs reiterate the theme of experiential or applied learning found in many universities (Garcia-Aracil, 2009; Mora et al., 2005). These graduates contribute an experienced perspective on both their education and entrance into their career. Providing work placements and well organized programs of higher education geared to their chosen field produced a satisfied educational consumer. A well designed program is quick to understand successful networking is not a one-sided agenda. According to the graduates surveyed, it involves a three-prong commitment to the goal of producing future professionals. Students should not be confused as to the effort, responsibility, and pay-off internships entail and should understand their responsibility not to take internships for granted (e.g., *you need to take it seriously*, Alumni Interview, #13; Higdon, 2004). Faculty should bridge the gap between students and professionals, building relationships with organizations and preparing students to learn the discourse and expecta-

tions of the field. Providing early access to students for faculty-student collaborations or field placements enhances the student's experience, impacting both satisfaction levels of the student and retention (NSSE, 2007). Both NSSE (2007) and CHEERS (Mora et al., 2005) results indicate directly to administrators that funding high impact learning opportunities such as study abroad, student-faculty research, service-learning, and field placement will reap dividends in building a satisfied student and graduate base.