**Excellence in Innovation – Diversity**

**Management Career Services, Dalhousie University**

Background:

The Rowe School of Business Workplace Experience Program was developed to address the needs of international students within the Bachelor of Commerce program at Dalhousie University. The Bachelor of Commerce had seen a rapid increase in international student enrollment since 2010, peaking at 25% of the class by 2013. This growth was accompanied by an increase in the number of international students electing to work in their home countries for their co-op work terms, or in Canada in jobs for which they were remunerated below minimum wage. The Workplace Experience Program is one of several initiatives introduced to support this group of students in their academic pursuits as well as their job search. The program was introduced as a pilot in 2014. It had 8 student participants and 7 host organizations.

Program Objectives:

There are two major objectives for the program. The first is that international students gain comfort and confidence in the Canadian work place. The second is that host organizations gain access to potential future employees that they might otherwise not have the opportunity to consider.

Program Details:

The program provides an opportunity for international students who have little or no work experience in Canada to spend time with an organization to experience Canadian workplace culture. It takes place in the summer after the students? first or second year. It is not a co-op work term and is unpaid. Employers are invited to host an international student for approximately 35 hours in total. The schedule is flexible so that it can be coordinated to fit the needs of both the host organization and the student. The schedule might be 2 days a week for one months, 2 afternoons a week for two months, or every day for just one week.

Specific goals for the participating students are to:

- learn about Canadian workplace culture and expectations,

- participate in workplace discussions and activities,

- receive valuable feedback to help them build confidence in their Canadian job search.

The achievement of these goals were measured through surveys to students and host organizations at the end of the program.

Program Results:

Students were asked to respond to a number of statements. Results relating to the specific program goals listed above are detailed below.

1. The Canadian workplace was different than you expected:

Yes: 75% (No response to survey: 25%)

Relevant Comments:

“I did not expect that the workers would be so opened to help and answer questions. I could notice that here people are less worried about losing a job and more willing to help.”

“The culture are totally different than I thought, and the relationship between co-workers are really good, people respect each other, and the company give people more opportunity to share their ideas.”

“More professional and work very efficiently.”

2: Did you participate in workplace activities and/or discussions? (Example: staff meetings, group/team project meetings)

Yes: 62.5% no 12.5% (No response to survey: 25%)

3. Rate your confidence level applying for a job in Canada before you completed the Workplace Experience Program:

Confident 25%, Somewhat Confident: 12.5%, Not confident: 37.5%, (No response to survey: 25%)

4. Rate your confidence level applying for a job in Canada now that you have completed the Workplace Experience Program:

Very confident: 12.5% Confident: 50%, Somewhat Confident 12.5%, (No response to survey: 25%)

Relevant Comments:

“The Workplace Experience Program was a great opportunity for me to have a first contact with the Canadian workplace. It didn't give me a work experience, but it improved my confidence by talking to Canadians in a professional environment. I could also understand better their view about working in Halifax, and have an idea of what type of career I can expect working in a company similar to that one.”

5. Did you receive feedback and/or advice to help you with your future Canadian job search?

Yes: 75% (No response to survey: 25%)

Host Organizations were asked to respond to a number of statements. Results relating to the specific program objectives noted above are detailed below.

1) Did your organization benefit from participating in the program?

Yes: 71% (No response to survey: 29%)

Relevant Comments:

- I feel that she would be an excellent employee and now that we have a relationship with her, we hope that she will work here casually next year during her final year of school.?

- It assists managers in providing growth to youth.?

- It is important for us to be connected with international students. We need these students to stay in Halifax and add to the quality of our workforce. Immigration is very important to our future.?

2) Would you take part in the Workplace Experience Program again next summer?

Yes: 71% (No response to survey: 29%)

Written feedback:

“It did not disrupt our office and benefited both student and branch.”

“Absolutely.”

Outcomes:

The program was featured on the front page of the Business section of the provincial Newspaper The Chronicle Herald, a story that was distributed by Academica Group's Top Ten, and through this we received feedback and enquiries from career services across the country and internationally.

It will continue in 2015 with a goal of doubling student participant numbers. While the pilot group were Commerce Co-op students the program can easily be replicated for other academic programs that don't have an already existing work-integrated-learning component.

**What was the budget range of this project?**

Low ($1-$1,000)

**What was the size of the team working on this project?**

2 people