



Rosen Research Focus | Zhong, Murphy & Weinland

# INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIPS

## Unlocking the value of global experience

*In much of Europe, internships are mandatory for students. Despite their importance, international internships remain an underexplored area of research regarding how they shape hospitality and tourism students' skills, attitudes, and connections with their institutions. At UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, a study by Dr. YunYing Zhong, Dr. Kevin Murphy, and the late Dr. Jeffrey Weinland has uncovered that internships are far more than just resumé builders. The research has a significant impact on advancing educational practices that meet the demands of a globalized industry.*

**A**s the hospitality and tourism industry becomes increasingly global, the demand for professionals with cross-cultural skills and experience has never been greater. In this context, international internships have become a staple of hospitality and tourism education, allowing students to work abroad and

gain real-world exposure. Yet, despite the industry's value placed on these internships, most studies mainly describe the benefits of international internship, rather than quantify its effects on critical outcomes such as student satisfaction and loyalty. Recognizing this gap, Dr. YunYing Zhong, Dr. Kevin Murphy, and the late Dr. Jeffrey Weinland conducted a landmark study, uncovering

insights into the value of international internships for European hospitality students.

Published in the *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, this research is one of the first to apply a structured 'value' framework to capture the impact of international internships on students. It addresses critical questions about what students gain, their sacrifices, and the factors influencing their satisfaction and loyalty to their institutions. By filling this research gap, the study provides a foundation for future inquiries into global hospitality and tourism education and offers valuable guidelines for institutions aiming to strengthen their internship programs.

Despite their importance, international internships in hospitality and tourism remain an underexplored area of research, particularly in Europe. International professional training has been a long-standing tradition and is strategically important at a policy level in Europe. The European Union's Blueprint for



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Sector Cooperation on Skills, introduced in 2016, emphasizes building a globally competent workforce, especially in industries like hospitality and tourism that benefit from cultural exchange and mobility. Thus, many European hospitality and tourism programs require them for graduation.

Dr. Zhong and her colleagues sought to understand how European students evaluate these mandatory experiences, making their study one of the few to focus on this demographic. The research has broader relevance—the study provides a structured ‘value’ structure to assess how international internships shape careers in a globalized industry, not only among European student populations but also other student demographics.

### **UNPACKING THE ‘GIVE VS. GET’ FRAMEWORK**

To address the complex dynamics of student internships, the researchers adopted a structured methodology centered on the concept of ‘value’ derived from marketing literature. In this study, value is defined as a balance between what students ‘get’ (e.g., skills, networking opportunities) and

what they ‘give’ (e.g., financial and personal sacrifices). This ‘give vs. get’ framework provides a lens through which to measure the benefits of internships relative to the costs borne by students.

The study focused on hospitality management students from two European universities, using a purposive sampling method to recruit participants who had completed at least one international internship. These students, ranging across bachelor’s and master’s programs, were surveyed to assess their perceptions of value, satisfaction and loyalty intentions toward their institutions. The researchers distributed an online questionnaire measuring ten core constructs within the ‘give’ and ‘get’ dimensions, including conditional value (support services provided), functional value (career advancement opportunities), social value (networking), and monetary sacrifice (costs associated with travel and living abroad).

Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the relationships between these constructs were analyzed to determine how different factors influenced students’ overall satisfaction and loyalty to their universities. PLS-SEM allowed the team to explore complex, multidimensional constructs and provided a robust analysis of the variables involved in students’ internship experiences. By examining these constructs individually and collectively, the researchers could reveal

that values adaptability, customer service and problem-solving. For hospitality and tourism students, experiential learning through internships is a way to bridge classroom knowledge with real-world applications.

European hospitality students reported that their internships allowed them to handle guest interactions, coordinate events and take on responsibilities that enhanced their practical skills. This ‘learning by doing’ approach strengthened their technical abilities and fostered a sense of resilience and confidence that traditional classroom learning could not. The study highlights that experiential learning through internships builds ‘a toolkit of skills’ for students, preparing them for the complexities of the hospitality industry.

The study validates the benefits of experiential learning in hospitality and confirms that international internships offer value beyond what students can achieve in a classroom. Students gain critical skills in managing diverse cultural dynamics, working within unfamiliar regulatory environments and solving real-world challenges, which are essential for a globally oriented career in hospitality and tourism.

### **MORE THAN HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE**

The study’s findings reveal that students’ perceptions of value are complex and influenced by various factors. Overall, students reported that the ‘get’ side of their experience, such as career opportunities, social networking

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insights into how different facets of the internship experience contribute to perceived value and loyalty.

### **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN HOSPITALITY: BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

The study grounds its findings in the experiential learning theory, which emphasizes the value of hands-on experience in building practical skills. This concept is especially relevant to hospitality and tourism, an industry

and emotional growth, far outweighed the ‘give’ side, which included financial costs and personal sacrifices. Social value and networking, in particular, were highlighted as key benefits, as students connected with industry professionals who could open doors for their future careers.

However, the study also found that perceived value was not solely professional. Students gained emotional fulfillment and a sense of



Future studies can continue to uncover best practices for integrating global experiences into hospitality education.

personal achievement, reporting that the internship experience enhanced their self-confidence and resilience. These findings indicate that emotional and social growth are integral to students' perceived value, reflecting the holistic impact of international internships on personal and professional development.

Critically, the study revealed that students' satisfaction with their internship experience directly influenced their loyalty intentions toward their universities. Students who felt their internships were valuable were likelier to recommend the program and maintain connections with their alma mater. The research team explains that satisfaction fosters loyalty, turning students into ambassadors for their institutions. This loyalty, in turn, has significant implications for universities, underscoring the long-term impact of structured, supportive internship programs.

#### **LOYALTY AND INTENTIONS— STRENGTHENING UNIVERSITY- STUDENT BONDS**

A central aspect of this study is the connection between internship value and students' loyalty intentions. Students who derive satisfaction from their internships develop stronger bonds with their institutions, which is essential for fostering ongoing alum engagement. Satisfaction and loyalty are linked, with students who find high value in their internships being more likely to endorse their programs to others and stay engaged with alumni networks.

This connection holds meaningful implications for Rosen College's approach to alum relations. Dr. Weinland, whose legacy of dedication to

hospitality education endures, long supported the concept of internships as a pathway to lasting loyalty. This study captures his insights, which reveal that satisfied students who value their internships highly form stronger ties to their institutions. For institutes like Rosen College, this insight highlights the importance of well-structured internship programs for building lasting alum relationships.

#### **ADDRESSING THE EU'S VISION FOR TRANSNATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

This study provides evidence for the EU supporting their commitment to fostering cross-border educational experiences. International internships are not merely

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academic exercises—they are tools for skill development that address the EU's objective to create a workforce prepared for the demands of a globally interconnected industry. The study confirms that the EU's investment in mobility initiatives aligns well with students' career goals and learning needs, suggesting that such programs are essential for building a skilled, versatile workforce.

The findings from this study offer practical recommendations for universities and policymakers aiming to enhance the value

of internship programs. To optimize student outcomes, the Rosen College team advises universities to communicate internship expectations, provide logistical support and establish a feedback loop with industry partners. Such support helps students navigate challenges like securing visas, finding accommodations and covering travel expenses, allowing them to focus more fully on their professional development.

Additionally, the study opens new avenues for future research, inviting scholars to investigate international internships in diverse contexts. The team suggests that further studies could compare mandatory and voluntary internships across regions, examine industry-specific factors that impact satisfaction and assess the long-term career impacts of international experiences. By expanding on this research, future studies can continue to uncover best practices for integrating global experiences into hospitality education.

#### **A LEGACY OF RESEARCH AND IMPACT**

This research, led by Zhong, Murphy, and Weinland, represents a significant contribution to hospitality and tourism education. By highlighting the untapped value of international internships, the study provides insights to shape future approaches to hospitality training and alum engagement. The findings affirm that internships are more than just resume builders—they are

transformative experiences that foster personal and professional growth, lifelong loyalty, and cultural competence.

This study also underscores Rosen College's leadership in hospitality research and dedication to advancing educational practices that meet the demands of a globalized industry. The insights from this research will guide students, universities and industry stakeholders as they work together to prepare the next generation of hospitality professionals.



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. YunYing Zhong, Dr. Kevin Murphy, and Dr. Jeffrey Weinland highlight the impact of internships on advancing educational practices that meet the demands of a globalized industry. The study was funded by a grant from The American University of Florence.

## REFERENCES

Zhong, Y., Murphy, K., Khalilzadeh, J., Smith, R.M., Weinland, J. (2022). A European student perspective of international internship value. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, 23 (2), 159–183. [doi.org/10.1080/15313220.2022.2109552](https://doi.org/10.1080/15313220.2022.2109552)

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

### What surprised you in the outcome of your study, and why?

// The study found that multiple factors influence students' perceptions of value from international internships. Students felt that the benefits—such as career opportunities, networking, and emotional growth—far outweighed the costs, including financial and personal sacrifices. Social value and networking were particularly important, as students connected with industry professionals who could benefit their careers. Additionally, emotional fulfillment and personal achievement were significant, with students reporting increased self-confidence and resilience. Interestingly, these findings highlight internships' universal impact on personal and professional development and their loyalty intentions to their universities. //



## Dr. YunYing Zhong



Dr. Zhong is a member of the Disability Aging & Technology Cluster and an Assistant Professor at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management. Since her appointment, she has helped develop the new Bachelor of Science degree in Lifestyle Community Management and actively engaged with industry partners such as Florida Senior Living Association, Westminster Communities of Florida, Brookdale, Holiday Retirement, Harbor Chase, Legacy Point, and LIFE at UCF.

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## Dr. Kevin Murphy



Dr. Murphy joined UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management in 2003 and earned his Ph.D. in Management and Human Resources from the department of Hospitality Tourism Management, Virginia Tech, Pamplin College of Business. He is one of a very few Certified Executive Chefs in the USA to hold a Ph.D. He has researched and published extensively in top journals in the area of foodservice sanitation, safety and health and other restaurant related issues and he has over 80 academic publications. Dr. Murphy has been an invited speaker and presenter nationally and internationally and has given over 120 media interviews in TV and press at the international, national and local level on these topics.

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## Dr. Jeffrey Weinland



Jeffrey Weinland's career in the hospitality industry spanned more than 30 years, during which time he operated businesses, provided consulting services, developed training programs, and investigated embezzlement and fraud cases. He held several professional licenses and earned numerous professional designations in the areas of lodging management, real estate brokerage and hospitality accounting.