

# Evaluating Personal Income from Internships

Deborah E. Krafczek  
*Arthur Andersen & Co.*  
*St. Charles, Ill.*  
and  
Barbara Lefferts  
*American Cancer Society, Inc.*  
*New York*

**Abstract.** Graduate students contemplating an instructional design internship should consider not only what they have to offer an organization but what they want to take away from the experience. Current literature on this topic focuses on the mutual benefits of internships for both the business and academic communities. This paper concentrates solely on the benefits to the individual interns which may be described as three kinds of personal income: financial, experiential, and psychological incomes. A group of former and current interns were interviewed and were asked to give their opinion on the three incomes. Then they were asked to evaluate the importance of each income, both before and after their internship. Interviews revealed some trends in how participants described the three incomes and indicated that an internship itself may precipitate a shift in how one rates the importance of each. In order to help prospective interns assess what they want from a position, a checklist of questions to consider is included.

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*"In order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: They must be fit for it. They must not do too much of it. And they must have a sense of success in it."*

John Ruskin (1819-1900)

These words, written one hundred years ago, suggest a timeless formula for worker satisfaction. Achieving the right match, however, is not easy. Consider,

for example, the movement toward more worker autonomy that is to permeate General Motor's new Saturn facility. Recently, *Business Week* featured this bold new experiment describing how a "new equality" would replace the former management structure by switching to consensus decision-making among the rank and file (Edid, 1985). One intended outcome is to increase job satisfaction through participation on the part of all employees. To this end, work units will be carefully chosen by focusing not only on the ability of prospective employees, but also on their compatibility with the work environment.

Now imagine this: You are a graduate student in instructional technology. To gain practical instructional design experience, you apply for an internship at a corporate training facility. You believe this would be the perfect opportunity, to earn while you learn—financial and experiential income guaranteed.

Armed with your resume and portfolio of writing samples, you arrive at the personnel office. First, you take a series of tests to assess how well you will fit into the hi-tech system. You pass muster with personnel but there's one more hurdle to clear. You must be interviewed by and offered a position with one of the various project teams before you can be hired. So you make the rounds until you find a group where your technical skills, work ethic, and sense of humor will make you well-accepted.

Such interest in worker productivity and satisfaction reinforces Ruskin's earlier notion that people are happier in their work knowing that they are (a) qualified for the position, (b) achieving a comfortable balance between their personal and professional lives, and (c) successful in what they do.

Today's job seekers aspire to the same goals, but they target their approach according to slightly different standards. Individuals today are encouraged to

validate career choices through the practice of internships and to think of each new opportunity in terms of the "gives" and the "takes." To do this, two questions must be asked:

1. What do you have to give the organization? In other words, what skills and prior work experience will you offer to a prospective employer? Typically, this information is packaged in the form of a resume and presented in person during the interview process.

2. What do you want to take away from the job? This question suggests that what you get from a job may be something more than just a pay check. While financial income is certainly an important benefit, other types of income are just as important to consider at the beginning of a career.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the second question from the perspective of instructional design interns. We invite readers to broaden their concept of income to include experiential and psychological income in addition to financial income. Our primary goal is to provide a more balanced outlook for prospective interns. However, graduate advisers in performance technology programs and personnel recruiters in business and industry may also benefit as they seek to achieve the best possible placements for their people.

Twenty interns helped define and evaluate the importance of the three income areas: financial, experiential and psychological. Their opinions follow a brief review of current literature on the topic.

## Current Literature on Internships

### For the Individual

For the aspiring instructional designer, a wealth of information is available on what to expect from an internship, how to manage the internship, and how to develop mutually beneficial relationships with the graduate adviser

and the training organization. For example, Snyder (1984) proposes seven rules to follow to help ensure a successful internship. The emphasis is on front-end planning (know what you are getting into) and survival (how to take advantage of the relatively risk-free atmosphere to develop yourself professionally). Sink and Sari (1984) also offer practical guidelines for how to conduct yourself during the internship. Their focus is on the costs and benefits to the business and academic communities as well as to the individual.

### For Business and Industry

On the business side, a growing number of case studies of operational internship program models have been published (Lanese & Fitch, 1983; Bialac & Wallington, 1985). These, too, emphasize the mutual benefits of internships to all parties concerned, and offer the intern proven methods for avoiding pitfalls.

Participants were classified into four groups according to their intern or employment status as follows: (a) former interns from Arthur Andersen & Co. who were subsequently hired as full-time educational staff, (b) former interns from Arthur Andersen & Co. who did not join as full-time educational staff, (c) graduate students who were current interns at Arthur Andersen & Co., and (d) full-time educational staff at Arthur Andersen & Co. who previously had completed an internship with another business or industry.

During interviews, participants were asked to describe examples of the three incomes that related to their personal internship experience. The following sections summarize participant responses.

### Financial Income

Most participants found it easy to comment on the financial income that they derived from their internships. For

describe the benefits reaped. A more accurate description, the individual offered, would be to call the sum total of internship experiences a "career investment." A few participants stressed the value of working on several different projects. For these individuals, diversity meant the opportunity to learn more about the organization by working with a wider range of tasks (from formatting print material to conducting a pilot test) and dealing with a greater variety of people (e.g., managers, graphic artists, and instructors). Others appreciated the sense of closure derived from carrying only one project through to completion.

Participants also coveted the opportunity to cite instructional design experience on a resume. The internship, no doubt, supplied them with this highly prized income—a necessary foot in the door at the start of a career.

### Psychological Income

Psychological income was not as easy to define. Additionally, it seemed to require more reflection on the individual's entire experience. However, as with financial and experiential incomes, some trends were apparent.

Confidence building was at the heart of most responses. Specifically, participants gained self-reliance in: (a) producing a professional product, (b) surviving outside the world of academe, (c) working with unfamiliar technical content, and (d) understanding business protocol. Other comments indicated a sense of pride and accomplishment in the tasks that were completed. Participants received a great psychological boost from realizing the marketability of their skills and making contacts for future jobs.

For many, the opportunity to consult with and confide in other interns from different academic programs heightened the value of the experience. One participant commented, "The intern program was structured so that you get to know the other interns. We were housed together and there were social activities planned. The experience of being closely associated with others who were going through the same thing was very beneficial."

And finally, as evidenced by one former intern, the internship helped to validate a career choice: "I understand as a result of my internship how the field of instructional design fits into my whole life. I also learned a great deal about what is important to me in my work."

## Individuals today are encouraged to validate career choices through the practice of internship.

The most comprehensive resource for prospective interns is a publication by the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education called *The Experienced Hand: A Student Manual for Making the Most of an Internship* (Stanton & Ali, 1982). Covering everything from how to find an internship to how to celebrate your accomplishments when you're through, this manual is an invaluable aid for interns entering a wide variety of fields, not just instructional design.

The approach taken in this paper differs from those cited above by concentrating solely on the intern's perspective. Interns were asked, "How much of the benefit you received is financial?" "How much is experiential?" Also, "How might you define the so-called psychological income area?"

### Three Income Areas

In the spring of 1986, informal interviews were conducted with 20 indi-

those interviewed, total compensation meant more than just a weekly salary. Interns factored in the benefits of low-cost or subsidized housing, the provision for travel and moving expenses, as well as medical or life insurance coverage. Overtime pay and having the option to receive an advance on salary also counted as financial income.

### Experiential Income

Participants also found it relatively simple to comment on the experiential income of their internships. This was easy to understand as experiential income may also be translated into program goals. For example, the interns collectively emphasized the value of the following experiences: (a) putting theory into practice, (b) getting exposure to a business/industrial setting, (c) seeing a project through several phases, (d) relating to subject matter experts, and (e) working with real deadlines.

For one participant, the term "income" was not broad enough to

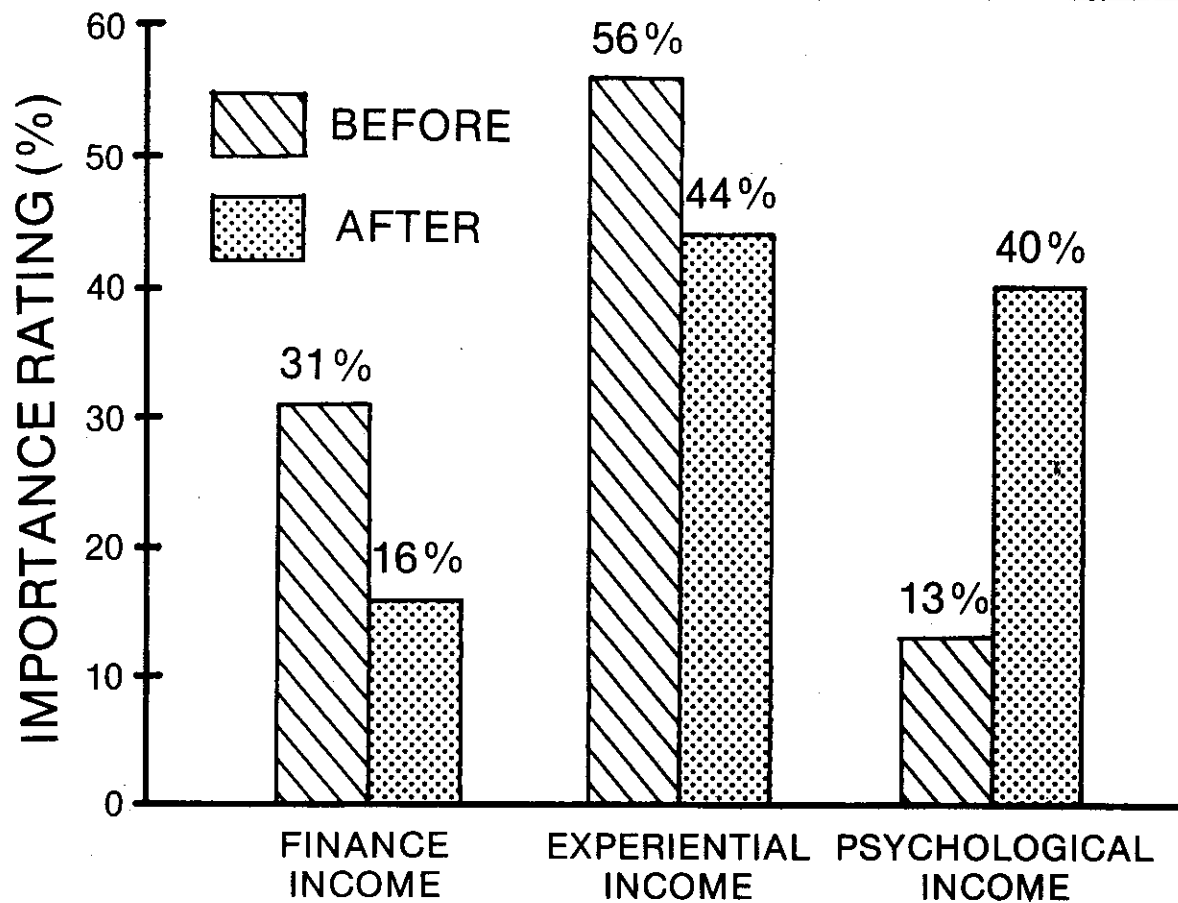


Figure 1. A comparison of how participants rated financial, experiential and psychological incomes: Mean percentages before and after internships.

While the financial and experiential incomes were easier to describe, our conversations exploring psychological incomes triggered more retrospective comments regarding job satisfaction.

### Rating the Importance of Incomes

Another goal of the interviews was to find out how individuals would rate the three incomes in terms of relative importance. The assumptions inherent in this evaluation were: (a) There are three types of income, (b) each income may be assigned a numerical value based on its relative importance to the other two, and (c) when added together, the assigned values would equal 100%.

First, participants were asked to rate how important each income was before the internship began. Then they were asked how they would rate each income after their internship. In the case of current interns, "after" opinions reflected their experience to date. This information was used to assess how the intern-

ship period might have affected their opinions.

Figure 1 presents mean percentages for the participants we interviewed.

Based on a comparison of the mean percentages for the before and after ratings in Figure 1, it appears that: (a) the importance of financial income decreases after an internship experience, (b) the importance of experiential income decreases after an internship experience, and (c) the importance of psychological income increases after an internship.

During interviews we asked participants to provide a rationale for their ratings. This information provided clues for interpreting the data and, more specifically, for understanding any noticeable shifts in the before and after ratings.

Participants reasoned that financial income was rated fairly high (31%) before their internship because they had not previously held a paid instructional

design position. Making the transition from "backpack to briefcase," they were eager to establish a financial standard for themselves. Thus financial income was important. The data show that the importance rating for financial income dropped by about 50% after the internship (see Figure 1). Participants explained that this decline was relative to their greater appreciation for the other two incomes, rather than an actual decline in their interest in financial income.

Experiential income had the highest mean percentage in both the before and after rating categories (56% and 44%). This was reinforced by participants who stated that getting their first instructional design experience was extremely important. In fact, most participants cited "experience" as their primary reason for undertaking an internship. The fact that the rating on this income decreased only slightly (about 21%) is not surprising because many participants realized through their internship

that broadening their skills would remain a high priority throughout their careers.

Psychological income was rated lowest of the incomes in the before category (13%) primarily because participants were not conscious of it as an income at the time. The data show that after the internship, the importance ratings for psychological income increased by about 200% (see Figure 1). Reasons for this substantial increase focused on the participants' discovery that psychological income was essential to achieving a sense of success in their work.

### Summary

Internships represent a significant career investment supported by both higher education and business. Internship programs seem to offer the type of learning that complements what is learned in a graduate program. For those we interviewed, the internship provided substantial benefits, not only financially and experientially but psychologically as well. Therefore, in planning an internship, it is wise for prospective interns to evaluate what they want from each income "in order that (they) may be happy in their work."

## Appendix

### Checklist for Prospective Interns

What's in it for you? The following checklist will help you evaluate the financial, experiential and psychological incomes you can expect to receive from a particular internship opportunity. Add or delete questions to suit your unique job requirements.

### Financial Income (Compensation)

- \_\_\_ Will the job pay you what you're worth?
- \_\_\_ Is there any compensation for housing?
- \_\_\_ Will you be paid as a self-employed consultant or on salary?
- \_\_\_ Are there any medical or life insurance benefits?
- \_\_\_ Will you be compensated for interviewing and moving expenses?

### Experiential Income (Job Tasks/Projects)

- \_\_\_ What kind of projects will you work on?
- \_\_\_ What types of decisions will you be making?
- \_\_\_ What specific tasks will you be responsible for?

### Psychological Income (Job Satisfaction)

- \_\_\_ What is the corporate climate or work environment like?
- \_\_\_ Will you have a mentor or coach to help you along?
- \_\_\_ What type of environment or project structure do you work best in?
- \_\_\_ How much autonomy will you have?
- \_\_\_ Is there room for trial and error?
- \_\_\_ What kind of feedback will you receive and how often will you be evaluated?
- \_\_\_ How will you measure your successes?

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The three income areas are Financial Income, Experiential Income, and Psychological Income.

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- \_\_\_ How will you be evaluated?
- \_\_\_ What training is available to help you learn about the organization?
- \_\_\_ What personnel and equipment resources will you have at your disposal for your assignment?
- \_\_\_ Will you get to see a project from beginning to end?
- \_\_\_ Will you have the subject matter experts to get the job done?
- \_\_\_ Will you get to pilot test your work with a target audience?