Effects of Internship Involvement with Change Agent Productions, January – October, 2011

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Introduction

Change Agent Productions (CAP) is a social enterprise of the YMCA of Greater Long Beach Community Development Branch which began in October, 2007, and is currently funded by a grant from Beneventures Foundation. Change Agent Productions (CAP) is comprised of professional digital media artists who work alongside urban youth who have graduated from the YMCA Youth Institute (YI) to carry out professional media projects. CAP was specifically designed to provide challenging, positive youth, and career development opportunities for low-income, culturally-diverse high school and college-age youth. CAP work opportunities for youth are designed to build on the job skills training they received while in the YI and to help them more fully develop their business, academic, technical and social skills. This research explores the effects of internship participation with Change Agent Productions among low-income, culturally-diverse, urban teens and young adults.

CAP was primarily designed to provide media services to community-based organizations and non-profits. CAP provides a wide-range of media services including video (documentaries, advertisements, public service announcements), graphics (corporate branding, brochures, professional reports, magazines), web (construction, layout, domain registration), audio-visual (on-site tech set-up and support, presentation equipment), photography and training (movie-making, animation, graphic design, media lab consultation). Whenever feasible, CAP employs interns with stipends to work on their paid projects.

CAP Interns

YI alumni applied for internships with CAP by completing an application and filling out a survey, providing their grades, and completing an interview. This process was designed to help them to develop skills in obtaining a job. In the application, youth were asked to list their recent YI involvement, current extracurricular activities, number of hours per week they could work, the types of software and equipment they were most proficient with, and, the technology skills they would like to further develop. In addition, they are asked about possible time obstacles, skills they would like to acquire, potential career fields and their relationship to CAP, and what they personally hoped to accomplish through internship participation. They are selected for projects depending on their skill sets, availability, interests and acceptable grades. As of November 1, 2011, 42 high school and college-age youth had completed an application to work with CAP during the last year. Of those, 30 (71%) had actually worked on a least one job and are included in these analyses.

Methods

Design

A mixed-methods approach was used to explore the effects of working with CAP on interns. First, CAP staff (end of internship) and interns themselves (before and at end of internship) rated intern skill levels in three areas; interpersonal skills, professional/job skills, and technology skills. Second, interns were invited to participate in focus groups to explore effects of internship participation. The results of quantitative analyses are presented here while the focus group findings are contained in a second report.

Sample

As shown in Table 1, interns ranged from 14 to 21 with the majority falling between the ages of 16 and 18 (74%). Fifty-seven percent were male. Just over half (54%) were Latino, followed by Asian American/Pacific Islander (23%). Interns worked between one (70%) and six (3%) jobs with an average of almost 2 jobs per intern. The types of jobs varied and included filming and editing of videos, photography, audio-visual, technology set-up and training, animated e-greeting card and graphic design. Although 30 youth had jobs during the year, the number of interns included in each phase of the analyses presented here differs due to the availability of the data.

Table 1

Description of Change Agent Production Interns

(N = 30)

	%	N
Age		
14	17%	5
15	3%	1
16	17%	5
17	30%	9
18	27%	8
19	3%	1
21	3%	1
Gender		
Male	57%	17
Female	43%	13
Ethnicity		
Latino	54%	16
Asian American/Pacific Islander	23%	7
European-American	13%	4
African-American	7%	2
Bi/Multicultural	3%	1

Instrument

Ratings of Intern Skills

Both CAP staff and the interns completed rating forms designed to explore the effects of the project on interns' interpersonal, professional/job, and technology skills. These instruments were designed, in part, based on focus group findings from the first two years of the project. Interns rated their skills initially when they applied to CAP and

in October, when they participated in the focus groups. Participants rated their agreement with each skill statement on a scale ranging from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 4 "Strongly Agree." Higher scores indicated higher skill levels.

The interpersonal skills scale consisted of 11 items that measured intern self-assessment of their skill levels in working with and communicating with others. Questions included, "I am confident and comfortable working with clients," "I can effectively resolve group conflicts," and "I am respectful of different ideas and viewpoints." The alpha reliability was .65 to .70 for interns and .88 for staff.

The professional/job skills scale consisted of 16 items that measured intern self-assessment of basic skills required to hold a job. Questions included, "My work with CAP has helped me to be on time," "I manage my time effectively (prioritizing projects)," "I can identify creative solutions to a variety of situations," and "I accept responsibility for my mistakes." The alpha reliability was .78 to .79 for interns and .95 for staff.

The technology skills scale consisted of 8 items that measured intern self-assessment in working with different technologies. Questions included, "I have excellent skills in digital video editing (Final Cut Pro, iMovie, After Effects, etc.)," "I have excellent skills in graphic design (Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign)," and "I have excellent skills in web design (construction, layout, domain registration, maintenance, applications, Dreamweaver, Photoshop, HTML, peripheral configuration)." The alpha reliability was .73 to .80 for interns and .59 for staff.

Analysis

Self-report changes in the three skill scales and the individual technology skills were investigated using paired samples t-tests. Paired-samples t-tests were also done to compare intern self-assessment to supervisor assessment at the end of the internship.

Results

Intern Self-Assessment of Changes in Skill Levels

As shown below in Table 2, interns self-reported a significant improvement in their technology skills at the end of their CAP internship, t (13) = 2.70, $p < .05$.

Table 2

CAP Intern Self-Report of Changes in Skill Levels

	Pre- CAP			Post-CAP		
Scale	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Difference
Interpersonal Skills	3.38	.33	16	3.44	.28	.06
Professional/Job Skills	3.29	.35	16	3.29	.32	-.01
Technology Skills	3.21	.45	14	3.51	.48	.30**

*Approaching significance at the .10 level
**p < .05

Intern Self-Assessment of Changes in Individual Technology Skills

As shown in Table 3, these CAP youth reported significant improvements in their digital video editing, t (13) = 2.48, $p < .05$, and digital photography skills, t (13) = 3.12, $p < .05$, and somewhat of an improvement in web design, t (13) = 1.85, $p < .10$, at the end of their CAP internship.

Table 3

CAP Intern Report of Changes in Technology Skills

	Pre-CAP			Post-CAP		
I have excellent skills in:	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Difference
Graphic Design	3.21	.70	14	3.50	.65	.29
Web Design	2.57	.65	14	3.14	.86	.57*
Digital Video Filming	3.57	.65	14	3.86	.66	.29
Digital Video Editing	3.21	.70	14	3.64	.74	.43**
Audio/Visual	3.71	.61	14	3.93	.62	.21
Digital Photography	3.21	.70	14	3.64	.74	.43**
Animation	3.00	1.04	14	2.79	.97	-.21
Technology Training Skills	3.14	.86	14	3.57	.65	.43

*Approaching significance at the .10 level
**$p < .05$

Comparison of Intern and Supervisor Assessment of Skill Levels

As shown in Table 4, intern self-assessments of their technology skills was significantly higher than supervisor assessments at the end of the CAP internship, $t(19) = 2.27$, $p < .05$, while both supervisors and interns rated interpersonal and job skills similarly.

Table 4

Comparison of Intern and Supervisor Assessments of Skill Scales

	Intern			Supervisor		
Scale	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Difference
Interpersonal Skills	3.40	.29	20	3.48	.41	-.08
Professional/Job Skills	3.22	.33	20	3.23	.45	-.00
Technology Skills	3.41	.47	20	3.19	.34	.22**

*Approaching significance at the .10 level
**p < .05

As shown in Table 5, CAP interns self-reported significantly higher technology skills in web design, t (19) = 2.79, $p < .05$, and in digital photography, t (19) = 3.91, $p < .05$, compared to supervisors at the end of the CAP internship.

Table 5

Comparison of Intern and Supervisor Assessments of Technology Skills

	Intern			Supervisor		
I have excellent skills in:	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Difference
Graphic Design	3.35	.67	20	3.25	.64	-.10
Web Design	3.00	.86	20	2.35	3.00	-.65**
Digital Video Filming	3.70	.66	20	3.80	.41	.10
Digital Video Editing	3.60	.68	20	3.75	.44	.15
Audio/Visual	3.75	.64	20	3.60	.60	-.15
Digital Photography	3.65	.75	20	2.95	.83	-.70**
Animation	2.65	.88	20	2.35	.93	-.30
Technology Training Skills	3.55	.60	20	3.45	.69	-.10

*Approaching significance at the .10 level
**p < .05

Conclusions

This research presents an examination of the effects of youth internship participation in CAP, a social enterprise of the YMCA Community Development Branch. Changes in intern skills were measured by intern self-report before and after CAP participation, and by staff after CAP participation. To some extent, these results should be viewed and interpreted with caution since only about 50% of the interns for the year had the necessary data to be included and the sample size was small. Thus, in the future, it is important that staff ensure those applying for CAP complete the skills assessment along with their job application. In addition, the majority (70%) of the interns only worked one job and, it is likely, that more work experience might be necessary to see benefits in many of the areas assessed.

Interns self-reported significant improvement in their technology skills after CAP participation. In particular, technology skills, as reported by interns, were improved in the areas of digital video editing, digital photography, and, to some extent, web design. It is not surprising that the biggest changes were found in these areas given that many of the jobs they worked on required they use these technologies. While interns thought their technology skills were higher after working with CAP, staff rated technology skills lowest of the three skill areas measured here and significantly lower than the interns rated themselves. This may suggest that additional classes in the technology commonly used in CAP jobs may prove useful to interns and, in the long run, valuable to CAP.

At the end of the internship, both staff and interns gave fairly high ratings in the area of interpersonal skills. In particular, both interns and supervisors rated participants highly on accepting different ideas and viewpoints and getting along well with others.

Ratings on individual items indicated that interns may benefit from additional supports for writing skills and helping them to become more confident and comfortable working with clients.

The ratings of both interns and staff indicated some need to improve job skills. Both interns and staff rated participants highest on the job skill areas of asking questions and accepting responsibility for mistakes. Areas for improvement identified by interns were problem-solving and becoming less nervous in working with clients. While staff also noted the need for interns to become less nervous with clients, lower ratings were also given in the area of working with difficult clients and identifying creative solutions. It is possible that these areas will improve as these interns have the opportunity to go out on additional jobs. However, staff might also want to consider how mentoring or workshops might help interns improve these skills.

Overall, these findings suggest that CAP internship participation was helpful in increasing the technology skills of these interns. At present, intern exposure to actual CAP jobs continues to remain low which will likely limit their ability to gain important skills. Efforts to include and expose interns to diverse work situations should prove beneficial. It is also possible, as noted in the social enterprise literature (Ferguson, 2007; Ferguson & Islam, 2008), that additional training in key areas may be warranted.

References

Ferguson, K. M. (2007). Implementing a social enterprise intervention with homeless, street-living youths in Los Angeles. *Social Work, 52,* 103-112.

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