

Effects of Intern Involvement with Change Agent Productions, January – November, 2013

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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. CAP is comprised of professional digital media artists who work alongside urban youth who have graduated from the YMCA Youth Institute (YI) to complete professional media and training 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 youth internships are designed to build on the job skills training received while in the YI and to more fully develop their interpersonal, professional/job, and technology skills. This research explores the effects of internship participation with Change Agent Productions among low-income, culturally-diverse, urban teens and young adults during 2013.

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, training (movie-making, animation, graphic design, media lab consultation, youth development), assessment of teen media programs, and computer/laptop repair. Whenever feasible, CAP offers stipends for interns to work on their paid projects.

CAP Interns

YI alumni applied for internships with CAP by submitting an application form, filling out a skill assessment survey, providing their grades, and completing an interview. This process was designed to help them develop skills in obtaining a job. In the application, youth are asked to list their recent YI involvement, current extracurricular activities, number of hours per week they could work, types of software and equipment they were most proficient with, and the technology skills they would like to further develop. They are also asked about possible time obstacles, skills they would like to acquire, potential career fields and their relationship to CAP, and what they personally hope to accomplish through internship participation. Youth are selected for projects depending on their skill sets, availability, interests and acceptable grades. As of November 31, 2013, 41 alumni had worked on at least one CAP job during the year. Of these 41 interns, 33 (80%) had consents and some usable data for these analyses. This report focuses on those 33 youth.

Methods

Data Collection

As part of the application process, interns completed a self-assessment survey of their interpersonal, professional/job and technology skills. This assessment provided baseline skill levels. YMCA staff gave all interns who worked on a job during 2013 the “post” self-assessment form between October and December of 2013. Both forms were then given to the research team. CAP staff independently completed assessment forms on each intern when the intern first applied to CAP and during the last months of 2013. Some initial interns and supervisor forms were completed prior to 2013.

Sample

As shown in Table 1, interns ranged from 15 to 20, with an average age of 17. Fifty-five percent were male. Almost two-thirds (64%) were Latino. Interns worked between one (61%) and seven (3%) jobs with an average of two jobs per intern. The jobs included youth development and digital media training, video filming, editing and production, animation, digital media set-up, graphic design, and laptop repair.

Table 1
Description of 2013 Change Agent Production Interns
(N = 33)

	%	N
Gender		
Male	55%	18
Female	45%	15
Ethnicity		
Latino	64%	21
African-American	15%	5
Asian American/Pacific Islander	9%	3
European-American	6%	2
Bi/Multicultural/Other	6%	2
Age		
15	18%	6
16	31%	10
17	12%	4
18	18%	6
19	15%	5
20	6%	2

Instrument

Both CAP staff and interns completed rating forms regarding interns' interpersonal, professional/job, and technology skills when they applied for the internship (which may have been prior to 2013) and at the end of the year. These forms were designed, in part, from focus group findings from the first two years of the project. Participants rated their agreement with each skill on a scale ranging from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 4 "Strongly Agree." Higher scores indicated higher skill levels.

The interpersonal skills scale consisted of 13 items that measured skills in working 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 .82 for interns and .88 to .91 for staff.

The professional/job skills scale consisted of 16 items that measured basic skills required to hold a job. Questions included, "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 .80 to .87 for interns and .91 to .94 for staff.

The technology skills scale consisted of seven items that measured different technology skills. Questions included, "I have excellent skills in digital video editing," "I have excellent skills in graphic design," and "I have excellent skills in digital photography." The alpha reliability was .76 to .83 for interns and .69 to .75 for staff.

Analysis

Self-report and supervisor changes in the three skill scales, as well as comparisons between intern and supervisor ratings were investigated using paired samples t-tests. The sample size varies depending on the availability of the data for each group.

Results

Intern Self-Assessment of Changes in Skill Levels

As shown below in Table 2, interns rated themselves significantly higher in overall technology skills, $t(27) = 2.37, p < .05$, at the end of their CAP internship.

Table 2
CAP Intern Self-Report of Changes in Skill Levels

Scale	Pre- CAP			Post-CAP		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Difference
Interpersonal Skills	3.40	.33	30	3.45	.29	.05
Professional/Job Skills	3.22	.36	30	3.25	.36	.03
Technology Skills	3.09	.49	28	3.26	.49	.17**

** $p < .05$

Supervisor Assessment of Changes in Intern Skill Levels

As shown below in Table 3, supervisors rated interns significantly lower in technology skills, $t(19) = 3.34, p < .05$, at the end of their CAP internship.

Table 3
CAP Supervisor Report of Changes in Intern Skill Levels

Scale	Pre- CAP			Post-CAP		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Difference
Interpersonal Skills	3.27	.44	25	3.16	.45	-.10
Professional/Job Skills	3.01	.42	25	2.90	.39	-.11
Technology Skills	3.43	.31	20	3.14	.23	-.28**

**p < .05

Comparison of Intern and Supervisor Assessment of Skill Levels at End of Internship

As shown below in Table 4, supervisors rated interns significantly lower than the interns themselves in both Interpersonal Skills, $t(25) = 2.59, p < .05$, and Professional/Job Skills, $t(25) = 3.09, p < .05$, at the end of the CAP internship.

Table 4
Comparison of Intern and Supervisor Assessment of Intern Skill Levels at End of CAP Internship

Scale	Intern			Supervisor		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Difference
Interpersonal Skills	3.44	.30	26	3.18	.45	.26**
Professional/Job Skills	3.24	.36	26	2.91	.45	.34**
Technology Skills	3.28	.51	23	3.10	.35	.18

**p < .05

Conclusions

This research examined the effects of youth internship participation in CAP, a social enterprise of the Y Community Development Branch. Changes in intern skills were measured by self and supervisor report before and after CAP internship participation. Interns reported significant improvement in their technology skills, however, only minimal improvements were noted in interpersonal and professional/job skills. This represents somewhat of an improvement over last year when no significant skill changes were reported by CAP interns. Sixty-one percent of these interns only worked one job which may have influenced the perceived lack of movement in interpersonal and professional job skills, since involvement in a single job may not have been enough to improve all of the skills investigated here. It is possible that additional interpersonal or job modeling or skills training may prove beneficial in more fully developing these skills. In addition, youth were only involved in 36% of CAP jobs, thus, looking for ways to involve them in more aspects of the business might assist in further skill development. For instance, youth could potentially gain interpersonal, job and technology skills by working in an administrative capacity (assisting with billing or technology purchases, sitting in on client meetings, sending client up-dates on jobs) in the CAP office.

This is the first year that supervisor ratings were available before and after CAP work experiences. Supervisors reported youth had significantly lower technology skills after working for CAP. This finding is perplexing, however, it should be viewed with caution since 19 (76%) of the 25 youth were rated by different supervisors at the two time points. It is possible that the raters had different performance expectations or worked

with the youth on technology jobs which required different types of expertise. It is worth noting that supervisors rated interns significantly lower than the interns' themselves on interpersonal and professional/job performance skills. As suggested last year, these differences in skill perceptions may indicate the need for CAP supervisors to engage in more formal performance reviews with interns, either yearly or after a job is completed. This practice would provide interns both with experience in this aspect of employment and constructive feedback on their strengths and areas for growth. The low ratings in the area of professional/job skills again indicate the need to provide additional training on workplace behavior expectations. Given that the type of work CAP interns have engaged in has evolved over time, it may also be useful to revise the instrument to more fully reflect skills related to training, and assessment as well.