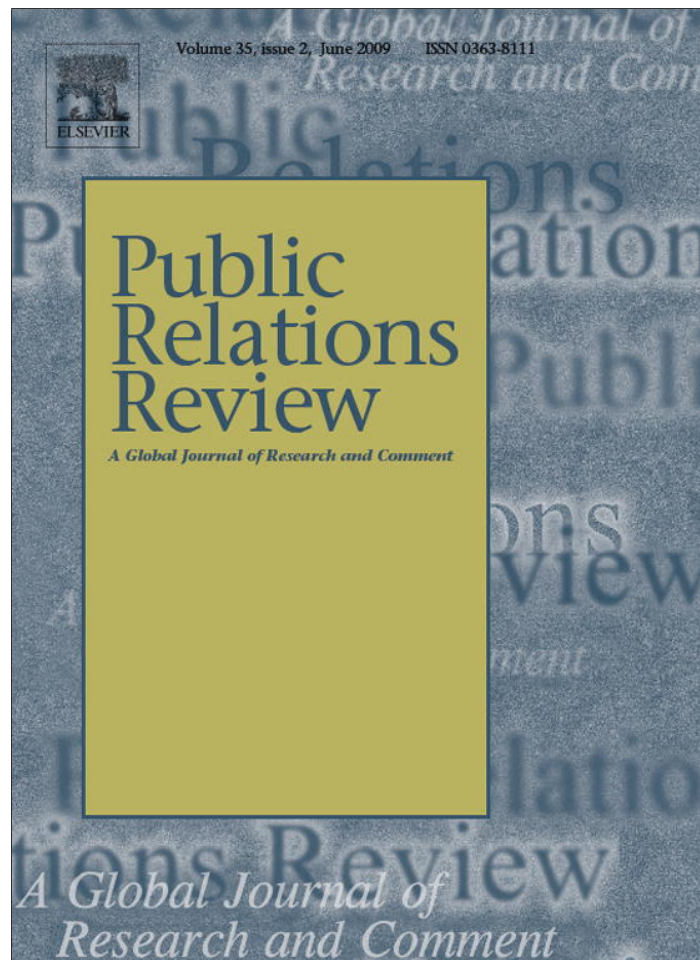


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## Public Relations Review



Research in brief

Job satisfaction in public relations internships<sup>☆</sup>Ashley Beebe<sup>a</sup>, Abigail Blaylock<sup>b</sup>, Kaye D. Sweetser<sup>c,\*</sup><sup>a</sup> Teach for America, United States<sup>b</sup> Jackson Spalding, Inc., United States<sup>c</sup> Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, 223-C Journalism Building, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-3018, United States

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## ABSTRACT

This online survey ( $n=290$ ) analyzed job satisfaction of internship experiences of communication students using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) and Job in General (JIG) scale. Participants self-reported higher rates of satisfaction among paid internships than either unpaid experiences. Also, results show that when rating job satisfaction, the students ranked learning job skills, having a good relationship with a supervisor, and having opportunity for advancement higher than salary when evaluating their internships.

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## 1. Introduction

Internships form a vital part of any student's education, giving the student a chance to hone his or her skills, interaction with more experienced professionals, and practice in different areas of the field. To this point, the Public Relations Student Society of America suggests internships can enhance a student's resume, portfolio, networking, and technical skills. Further importance of internships is that internship programs are one of the five areas of study that a school must provide its students in order to establish a PRSSA chapter. This online survey of students enrolled at a college which hosts a top public relations program investigates the relationship between intern job satisfaction and pay.

## 2. Methods

Participants ( $N=290$ ) were enrollment in the communication college at a large university on the east coast. The college is accredited by AEJMC, offers a degree in public relations, has several public relations faculty, and has an active internship program. An e-mail invitation was sent to approximately 1200 students via the college listserv to all students of the school since the public relations major at this college is limited and in high demand so many students use the other majors (e.g., advertising) as a gateway to entry in the college then later switch to public relations. The survey was open 2 weeks.

The Job Descriptive Index (JDI) scales and Job in General (JIG) Index measured satisfaction. The JDI measures five areas of a job to assess satisfaction: type of work, pay, promotion opportunities, supervision, and co-workers. The JIG scale is

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considered a companion to JDI, asking respondents to combine reactions to aspects of the job to form a single integrated response. Used together, the JDI/JIG test creates a satisfaction score for respondents ranging 0–54, where each of the five JDI facets and JIG scale are scored independently of one another then summed. Respondents are shown a series of adjectives and asked whether they fit with his or her job experience: “Yes” = 3 points, “No” = 0, missing answers = 1. Appropriate items were reverse coded. The median score indicating neutral satisfaction 27. Scores that fall above the median ( $\geq 32$ ) indicate satisfaction and scores that fall below the median ( $\leq 22$ ) indicate dissatisfaction.

Participants were asked major, number of internships, and pay status for internships.

### 3. Results

The majority of survey respondents were female (79%;  $n = 229$ ). The average age was 21.27 years. The sample contained seniors (38.3%;  $n = 111$ ), juniors (36.6%;  $n = 106$ ), sophomores (15.2%;  $n = 44$ ), and freshman (2.4%;  $n = 7$ ). The average number of internships for participants was 1.15 (S.D. = 1.04), though 31.4% ( $n = 80$ ) had not had any internship. Almost than half of those who had internships were paid (45%) while 55% were not paid. Those receiving pay for their work earned more than minimum wage, with the largest groups receiving between \$6–7.99 (27.1%;  $n = 23$ ), \$8–9.99 (16.5%;  $n = 14$ ), and \$10–11.99 (36.5%;  $n = 31$ ) per hour. One respondent failed to supply pay information.

#### 3.1. JIG

The mean score for the JIG across all respondents was 45.18 (S.D. = 12.32), indicating high satisfaction with the intern's job in general ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Variables (ranged 0–3, negative items reverse coded) within this facet were: *pleasant* ( $M = 2.78$ ; S.D. = .76), *bad* ( $M = 2.80$ , S.D. = .73), *ideal* ( $M = 1.62$ ; S.D. = 1.46), *waste of time* ( $M = 2.72$ ; S.D. = .85), *good* ( $M = 2.73$ ; S.D. = .84), *undesirable* ( $M = 2.78$ ; S.D. = .77), *worthwhile* ( $M = 2.72$ ; S.D. = .85), *worse than most* ( $M = 2.78$ ; S.D. = .76), *acceptable* ( $M = 2.82$ ; S.D. = .66), *superior* ( $M = 1.56$ ; S.D. = 1.47), *better than most* ( $M = 2.10$ ; S.D. = 1.34), *disagreeable* ( $M = 2.79$ ; S.D. = .75), *makes me content* ( $M = 2.41$ ; S.D. = 1.13), *inadequate* ( $M = 2.55$ ; S.D. = 1.06), *excellent* ( $M = 1.85$ ; S.D. = 1.42), *rotten* ( $M = 2.85$ ; S.D. = .63), *enjoyable* ( $M = 2.56$ ; S.D. = 1.04), and *poor* ( $M = 2.76$ ; S.D. = .79).

#### 3.2. JDI scales

Interns were not satisfied with pay ( $M = 22.54$ ; S.D. = 14.15) and promotion ( $M = 24$ ; S.D. = 16.05). Interns were satisfied with their work ( $M = 37.60$ ; S.D. = 10.45), co-workers ( $M = 43.49$ ; S.D. = 12.60), and most satisfied with their bosses ( $M = 43.79$ ; S.D. = 9.09). Cronbach's alpha for these facets were: JDI Work was .77, JDI Pay .85, JDI Supervisor .84, JDI Promotions .86, and JDI Co-workers .92.

#### 3.3. RQ1: Are paid interns more satisfied with their internships?

An independent samples  $t$  test on the JIG and each of the JDI scales tested the difference in satisfaction based on pay. Overall job satisfaction as rated through the JIG was higher among paid interns ( $M = 47.22$ ) than unpaid interns ( $M = 42.38$ ),  $t(166) = 5.66$ ,  $p \leq .05$ . It is important to note, though, that while this signifies a 3.84 difference, both groups are satisfied. Likewise, paid interns (30.30) were more satisfied on the JDI Pay index than unpaid interns (15.58),  $t(162) = 60.32$ ,  $p \leq .001$ .

#### 3.4. RQ2: Is there a relationship between internship satisfaction and experience?

The only statistically significant correlation between satisfaction and number of internships for respondents occurred on the JIG ( $r = .166$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ).

#### 3.5. RQ3: What factors predict job in general internships satisfaction?

A regression (stepwise) was run to determine what variables predict JIG satisfaction. The JDI Work, JDI Supervisor, JDI Promotions, JDI Pay, JDI Promotion, JDI Co-workers, internships held, age, and paid internship indices were used as independent variables. The JIG index was the dependant variable. The resulting model explained 76% of the variance ( $p < .001$ ). The model was made up of these variables as predictors (in order): JDI Work, JDI Supervisor, and JDI Promotions. The following variables were excluded: JDI Pay, JDI Promotion, JDI Co-workers, internships held, age, and paid internship.

### 4. Discussion

Using the JDI indices and the JIG scale, the study found that paid interns are indeed more satisfied with their work experience than unpaid interns. That said, unpaid interns are not *unsatisfied* and they also exhibit high levels of satisfaction with their experiences, indicating pay is not the sole determining factor of satisfaction. Results show that when evaluating their internships in regard to job satisfaction, the students ranked learning job skills, having a good relationship with a supervisor, and having opportunity for advancement higher than salary.

Though weak, the data here hints at the suggestion that more internships do not equate a stronger sense of satisfaction. Presumably, internships and one's job satisfaction are individual assessments.

This study's findings are important for both public relations students the industry in general. Pay is not a determining factor in an intern's satisfaction with his or her overall internship experience; other factors, including the real-world work itself and the relationship with the supervisor, are much more prominent. Public relations professionals should be mindful to cultivate meaningful relationships with their interns and give them real-life work experiences. Likewise, interns should respect their supervisors and not be afraid to seek their advice on assignments when needed. Mutually beneficial relationships between supervisors and interns are essential to overall job satisfaction.

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