A qualitative assessment of the Student Apprenticeship Program (SAP) during the second semester SY2010-2011

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to identify issues and challenges faced by Student Apprenticeship Program (SAP) and the factors that determine its efficiency and effectiveness. It also aimed to provide solutions to existing problems of the program to achieving and delivering performance excellence.

The researchers used a qualitative method and collected data during the weeklong FEU Job Fair using interviews and survey questionnaires. Results were summarized and given a narrative interpretation based on evaluation reports of students. Student data were triangulated with faculty observations and industry partner comments.

Results indicated that common problems faced by the program are in the areas of curriculum design and program scheduling; supervision and management; individual apprentices training plans; SAP advisers; utilization of facilities, equipment and materials; community, business and industry involvement; recruitment, assessment and placement; program promotion; and program accountability. Thus, it is recommended to revisit those areas of the program.

Keywords: internship/student apprenticeship, performance excellence

The Student Apprenticeship Program (SAP) of the Institute of Accounts, Business, and Finance (IABF) is the most valuable training experience for graduating students offered by the institute. IABF - SAP is a work-learning experience that involves training, supervision, and mentorship on well-defined professional jobs; clerical work is kept to a minimum. Apprentices do not, generally, receive monetary compensation. They gain knowledge, skills and abilities that are applicable in the professional work force.
As professors handling management subjects, we are witnesses of some of the problems encountered by our interns. Students are not exposed to office equipments which result to their inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Pre-orientation seminar for interns is conducted 2 weeks after the enrollment which could affect the timeline for scouting for companies. Also, interns have other subjects like the National Service Training Program (NSTP) which could negatively affect their SAP schedule.

In general, the study hopes to answer the question: "How can the IABF-Student Apprenticeship Program (SAP) be improved to produce well-prepared graduates to work more efficiently and effectively in their chosen career?"

Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions: 1.) what are the problems encountered by the students during their Student Apprenticeship Program? 2.) How effective has the SAP been? 3.) What are the proposed recommendations to improve the IABF-Student Apprenticeship Program?

While students are still in college, internships can help them develop immediate skills that can improve course performance, such as better time management, better communication skills, better self-discipline, heightened initiative, and an overall better self-concept (Dennis, 1996; Healy & Mourton, 1987; Kane, Healy, & Henson, 1992; Taylor, 1988). Theoretically, this should produce more confidence and less anxiety in the student as well as enhance specific academic skills. Therefore, performance measures such as grade point average may increase for those students who have had internships (Healy & Mourton, 1987).

Ultimately, the most important result of the internship should be better job opportunities, because students have experienced the world of work (Super, 1957). In fact, many students consider internships the most credible means to learn the reality of the work environment (Scott, 1992). Internship experiences should help students focus their career choices, hone their job
skills, personally focus their work values, and decrease their anxiety about the job search (Hall, 1976; Kane et al., 1992). Indeed, internships can soften the reality shock of transitioning from the world of academics to the working world. Students with internships should find a smaller discrepancy between what they learned in school and what they will actually be doing in the workplace (Kane et al., 1992; Taylor, 1988).

In addition, internships allow students to directly access job sources, to impress potential employers, to build confidence in their job search, to hone their work values, and to build social skills that are beneficial in the employment interview (French, 1998; Smith, 1996; Taylor, 1988). For example, internships can show potential employers how students think and solve problems on the job (McCormick, 1993). One study found that students who had internships found jobs more quickly upon graduation than students who did not have internships (Henry, 1979).

The previous SAP assessment identified few problems based on students' feedback. However, it failed to filter out specific problems areas and suggest specific solution. This used triangulation in discussing the research results and findings.

The study aimed to identify issues and challenges faced by the IABF - Student Apprenticeship Program and the factors that determine the efficiency and effectiveness of this program. This also aims to provide solution to existing problems of the IABF-SAP to achieving and delivering performance excellence.

If recommendations from this study will be implemented, issues encountered by the apprenticeship will be reduced. They can better manage their time. Our apprentices will have better workforce preparation which could lead to greater employability.

SAP advisers can better assist apprentices through a more structured program. They could also establish not only a strong relationship with companies but also with the students.
METHOD

The 2011 IABF-SAP Survey included apprenticeship students who are currently enrolled in the program this second semester, academic year 2010-11 and have completed at least half of the required number of OJT hours. The survey interviews were conducted in February 8-11, 2011.

The study made use of the qualitative research. The researchers collected data during the weeklong FEU Job Fair using interview and survey questionnaires. Results were summarized and given a narrative interpretation based on evaluation reports of SAP students during the second semester 2010-2011. Student data was triangulated with faculty observations and industry partner comments.

Respondents' Profile

The respondents of this study were students from the Far Eastern University – Institute of Accounts, Business, and Finance, who took their internship during the second semester, academic year 2010-2011. There were around a hundred who were interviewed.

Instrument

The researchers made use of the interview guide questionnaire to facilitate in data gathering.

Procedure

The data gathering took place during the Job Fair in the university on February 2011. Furthermore, the researcher utilized purposive sampling to determine the respondents for the study. In this technique, the researcher picked the respondents who are readily available at the time of the study.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data obtained in the study, the following findings were summarized hereunder:

There is a need to revise the curriculum for Student Apprenticeship/Industry Training. Subjects' offerings need to be revisited to ensuring that skills requirements needed by the industry are aligned with skills learned by the students in school. While enrolled in the program, students should not be taking other subjects like the National Service Training Program (NSTP) so as not to create conflict in their schedule.

There is a need to integrate a course in preparing the students to be exposed on the use of office machines and equipment. Students lack skills on how to use office equipments. Students must be exposed on the use of various office machines and equipment before deploying them to the industry partners.

There is a need for additional subject/s on how students can improve their communication skills. Students have difficulty communicating skills. During meetings, they are very silent and not sharing their ideas. Also, students must be ready to initially face the world of work in terms of time management, proper decorum, and etc.

The university must find a way on how to maintain a good working relationship with the industry partners for proper accommodation of trainees. The university must be the one to find the company where to deploy student trainees.

There is a need to properly assign the subject to more responsible faculty advisers. Students complain about few advisers not even visiting them in their work. They have no one to seek advice about problems they encounter at work.

The research outcome referenced some key points that would benefit the students of the Institute of Accounts, Business, and Finance as well as the advisers handling the Student
Apprenticeship Program. After a careful review of the findings and analysis of the data, the following items are thus recommended for the improvement of the IABF- Student Apprenticeship Program:

Curriculum Design and Program Scheduling. The modules used in the seminar must relate to appropriate industry standards. National Service Training Program (NSTP) should not be offered the same time with OJT so not to affect to the schedule of the apprentices. SAP information/announcements should be given ahead of time and posted in designated bulletin boards so that students will have enough time to prepare for their requirements.

Supervision and Management. The program must conduct an employer orientation workshop clarifying the scope of work of the apprentice. There should be a regular meeting between the students and their advisers for updating their problems they encountered at the workplace and to prepare for the requirements they need to submit on time. There must be a skip-level meeting, meeting between the apprentices, SAP coordinator, and the dean to discuss issues/concerns experienced by the students while on their OJT.

Individual Apprentices Training Plans. The apprentice together with his/her adviser must develop a training development plan. There must be tutorial programs available to supplement the apprentices' classroom training/seminar. There must job rotation for apprentices to acquire more skills out of this apprenticeship experience. The program must allow the students to have at least two (2) companies for their OJT to gain more knowledge, to give more seminars before the start of their OJT, and develop a list of affiliated companies for the students to choose from.

SAP Advisers. Apprentices must also evaluate the adviser's performance and program evaluations must be discussed with the advisers for continuous improvement. Apprentice complaints regarding lack of OJT supervision must be reported and properly documented to the SAP coordinator for disciplinary action. SAP advisers must be familiar and comply with the program's Rules & Regulations. The advisers should be approachable in terms of signing the
recommendation letter to prevent delays. They should also continue in visiting the respective companies of the trainees. SAP kit should be updated and organized and the dates of the seminars should also be found in the kit. Important announcement of events should be posted at the respective bulletin boards or/and they should announce it through text brigade or through e-mail. SAP advisers should be approachable and available for signing OJT documents.

Utilization of Facilities, Equipment and Material. The facilities for apprentice must be adequate for training needs. The classroom learning experience must teach students on how to operate office equipments used on the job site. Also, apprentices must receive safety training on the equipment being utilized in the workplace.

Community, Business and Industry Involvement. The program must utilize guest speakers from the business community on current topics and utilize industry or apprenticeship level role models as guest speakers.

Recruitment, Assessment and Placement. SAP of the IABF must advertise and make information available in the business community about apprenticeship opportunities. FEU should have a connection with big companies so that it would be easier for the students to find a company where they can have their OJT to experience, to learn more of things and also to boost their self confidence. The program must have a sufficient number of subscribing employers to permit consistent on-the-job training for the bonded apprentices. The program must have an adequate method for the placement of apprentices for on-the-job training.

Program Promotion. The institute must recognize any outstanding apprentices upon their graduation to motivate students to perform at their best. To develop a website for updates and important information; job fair should be conducted in a more spacious place for proper execution of their program of activities and for the students not to be confused.

Program Accountability. The program’s record keeping must be done on a timely basis to facilitate an updated status reporting. The program must have a mechanism to ensure that
apprentice training meets employer needs. Subscribing employers must regularly evaluate
performance of existing apprentices. The program must have apprentice completion and
apprentice graduation goals.

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Authors' Note

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Nenitha L. Junio is a full time Professor of the Far Eastern University - Institute of Accounts, Business and Finance and Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management and chair of Student Apprenticeship Program.

She is an educator in different fields as she finished courses in business and education, a Resource Speaker in various commencement exercises, Adviser and Consultant in MBA theses and STRAMA papers, author of instructional materials, published handbooks in apprenticeship and other related fields, active (Board) member and contributor in primary Cooperatives, and initiator /organizer of spiritual activities in different communities. She is a consistent teaching excellence awardee of FEU, (sent to Taiwan as a recipient) and presented papers in seminars and fora.

She obtained all her three courses from Far Eastern University: Bachelor of Science in Commerce, major in Economics; Master of Business Administration, major in Economics, and Doctor of Education, major in School Administration. Her units in Elementary Education and Bachelor of Laws were also taken from FEU.

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He was sent to the Asia Pacific Student Leadership Workshop at the Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2005 and also presented a paper and act as moderator in the first International Conference on Management Trends in May 2009 organized by National Taitung Junior College in Taitung City Taiwan ROC

He has several Outstanding Employee of the Year Awards and a consistent recipient of the Teaching Excellence Award for 4 consecutive semesters at the Far Eastern University.

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Domingo T. Balse Jr is a professor at the Far Eastern University located in the Manila, Philippines. He is handling International Business, Supply Chain Management, Total Quality Management, Principles of Marketing and Business Communication subjects. He has also been a Software Engineer in Accenture, Inc. Information Technology (IT) Solutions under Managed Testing Services (MTS) who later moved to International Business Machine (IBM Philippines) as a Team Lead. He has test planning, test scripting and test execution experience onshore for a mainframe system project. His mainframe area of expertise is in claims testing for one of the largest health insurance company in the US. He specializes in Unit Testing as the test phase. The scope of his testing experience includes Test Planning, Test Scripting, Test Execution and Defect Management. He has been a Business Systems Analyst (BSA) for one of the clients in Woodland Hills, California, USA. As a BSA, he served as a liaison between the business/client and computer engineers, developers or programmers, and software testers and managing the project from start to finish by providing updated status reports, handling issues and risks and ensuring projects are efficiently and effectively implemented to exceeding clients' expectation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Letter-Request to Respondents to Conduct Interview

Dear Sir/Madam:
Good day!

We, Nenitha Junio, Joey Tem and Domingo T. Balse, Jr, are faculty members of the Far Eastern University – Institute of Accounts, Business and Finance. We are undertaking a research paper entitled "A Qualitative Assessment of the IABF Student Apprenticeship Program (SAP) during the Second Semester 2010-2011".

In relation thereto, we would like to request your heartfelt cooperation in answering the questions presented in this questionnaire. The success of this paper will depend on your honest and sincere responses. We will provide you copies of the result of the study as well.

Rest assured that your answers will be held confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation. God bless.

Respectfully yours,

NENITHA L. JUNIO
IABF Faculty Member

JOSELITO P. TEM
IABF Faculty Member

DOMINGO T. BALSE, JR
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Appendix 2

Interview Guide

Thank you for participating in this important study. Your participation will contribute in a meaningful way. The entire survey should only take approximately 30 minutes. All responses are strictly confidential. You will not be identified, nor will you need to identify yourself at any point. You may choose to not participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in this survey is voluntary.

1. What are the tasks you commonly perform in your workplace?
2. Did you encounter any problem(s) during your training? If so, what is it all about?
3. How do you think can this problem be resolved?
4. What are your suggestions to improve the student apprenticeship program?

Thank you very much for your participation in sharing your important insights!
Figure 1 shows the research framework in analyzing the IABF-Student Apprenticeship Program. The inputs are the areas for improvement in the IABF-Student Apprenticeship Program. Revisiting the IABF Apprenticeship/On the Job Training is the throughput. The result/output would be better job opportunity and work force preparation.
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