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An Investigation of the Impact of Music Industry Cooperative Education on Student Academic Performance as Measured by Grade Point Average

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Introduction

Experiential education is considered an integral component of music industry education today. Often it is assumed that experiential opportunities lead to an improvement in a student's development, both in regards to academic performance and professional opportunities. For many students participation in experiential education leads to immediate payoffs in job offers and employment compensation (Hall, 1995). Educators look to experiential education as an opportunity for students to increase their knowledge of the music industry from a practical perspective. It is assumed that once an internship or co-op¹ has been completed, students will transfer their knowledge and experience to the classroom in the form of better class participation, greater understanding of concepts, and improved academic performance.

Given the general acceptance of experiential education, several authors have made assumptions about the effectiveness of experiential education on improving academic performance. One assumption is that internships and co-ops serve an important educational function well beyond the traditional didactic approach. For many authors (Crock et al., 1984; Fletcher, 1988; Hall et al., 1995) there is a division between what is learned on a theoretical basis and what constitutes knowledge in the work place. Only by observing, experiencing, and interacting with people in organizations can students compare abstract learning with the realities of organizational functioning.

A second assumption is that students—through experiential learning—are exposed to problems and data not available in a classroom setting. During their practical experience, many students are invited to staff meetings

and office planning sessions to observe how problems and issues are confronted on a day-to-day basis. These experiences enhance a student's understanding of the management and operational coordination of businesses which can be translated into organizational and management skills used in the classroom. Although, this experiential education function is extremely difficult to quantify, it is important in improving both developmental skills in students and organizational attributes of students that many employers value in employees. However, this approach is only applicable if students have access to the managerial decision-making process. In most cases, a student's role in a company is limited in scope and responsibility.

A third assumption is that students involved in experiential education develop personal skills not directly related to business employment, such as time management, improved self-discipline, and a heightened confidence and self-esteem (Healy and Mourton, 1987). Furthermore, many authors (Super and Hall, 1978; Van Gyn, 1997) assume that experiential education can help students understand and cope with the nuances, needs, and behaviors of colleagues in an intra-organizational structure.

Finally, there is the assumption that experiential education has a positive effect on the academic performance of students. This assumption is often driven by research that has found a positive association between GPA and post-baccalaureate earnings. (Wise, 1975; Filer, 1983) In most cases these studies show that employers use grade point averages as a primary screening device for selecting candidates (Fletcher, 1988). However, there is little evidence to suggest in the current literature that there is a correlation between co-op experience and immediate improvement in a student's academic performance.

Although there is much anecdotal evidence of the success of experiential education on a student's performance, there has of yet been no quantitative data to endorse these assumptions in music industry education. Given the lack of empirical research surrounding the effectiveness of experiential education, the purpose of this paper is to explore whether cooperative education has an effect on student performance both before and after the cooperative experience. It may be reasonable to assume that students who are satisfied with their experiential experiences will be more motivated in their studies, than those who have had a bad experience or no experience at all. This article will endeavor to answer these questions based on data collected over a ten-year period on two hundred alumni who participated in the co-

operative education program at Northeastern University's music industry program.

Prior Research

The value of experiential education has been well documented in business, public administration, and employment counseling literature. In nearly all cases the findings have shown that internships or cooperative education have had a positive effect on a student's ability to obtain and function in his or her first employment. However, studies in the relationship of experiential education and academic performance are fewer and the findings have been less conclusive. Studies that indicate a positive relation between internships and academic performance only find minimal differences in results. Koehler (1974) found that students' GPAs tended to improve following an internship. However, Kenechel and Snowball (1987) in a study that expanded the scope of Koehler's research through the use of a control group, found a significant decrease in overall academic performance for both interns and non-interns. Gardner, Nixon, and Motschenbacher (1992) found that grade point averages were higher for students who participated in co-ops than those of non-co-op students. In a study of business students Van Gyn, Cutt, Loken, and Ricks (1997) indicated that there is a strong correlation between higher GPAs and experiential education.

Although many studies have not conclusively found a direct correlation between experiential education and academic performance, there does exist in the literature numerous studies that indicate a relationship between experiential education and general business skills. English and Koeppen (1993) found that if internships are available to accounting students earlier in their academic careers, not only is there a positive effect on a student's grade performance, there are also ancillary benefits associated with experiential learning. They observed that desired skills, knowledge, and professional orientation could be utilized in a student's remaining academic studies. Taylor (1988) also suggested that college internships help students crystallize their vocational goals and improve overall work values. In a study by Crook, Healy, and O'Shea (1984) the authors found a correlation between self-esteem, career maturity, and GPA. Their study suggests that GPA does not produce mature attitudes, but mature attitudes obtained through work experience contribute to both an improved GPA and achievement in one's first employment. Beinstein (1976) reported that student participants in a work internship program experienced significant positive changes in

feelings of personal and social efficacy. Groves et al. (1977) documented the importance of an internship for a student as a potential bridge between the theory of the classroom and the world of practice. Tyler (1971) concluded that cooperative education increased the motivation for further study, clarified understanding of theory, developed skills which increased relevance of existing knowledge, and provided a realistic view of work.

Research Methodology

Participants

To investigate if music industry cooperative education has a positive effect on a student's grade point average in subsequent coursework, we began by identifying music industry students from data collected via Northeastern University's Office of the Registrar. The participants consisted of 230 students who graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Music with Concentration in Music Industry from 2000 to 2006. The sample was comprised of 80 females (34.8%) and 150 males. (65.2%) Participants ranged from 17 to 32 years of age with an average matriculation age of 18.73. The average graduation age of the students is 22.69 years (S.D. = 1.45), with the minimum age being 20 and the maximum 32. Tables 1 and 2 present descriptive statistics relating to the students' graduation age examined in this research.

Graduation Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 20	1	.4	.4	.4
21	28	12.2	12.2	12.6
22	91	39.6	39.6	52.2
23	77	33.5	33.5	85.7
24	13	5.7	5.7	91.3
25	10	4.3	4.3	95.7
26	3	1.3	1.3	97.0
27	3	1.3	1.3	98.3
28	2	.9	.9	99.1
29	1	.4	.4	99.6
32	1	.4	.4	100.0
Total	230	100.0	100.0	

Table 1. Graduation age of music industry students.

N	Valid	230
	Missing	0
Mean		22.69
Std. Deviation		1.455
Range		12
Minimum		20
Maximum		32

Table 2. Graduation age statistics.

Table 3 indicates the number of co-ops taken by the sample study. The majority of students in the program (82.6%) participated in at least one cooperative education experience during their tenure, with only 17.6% of the graduating students not participating in the co-op program. Of the students who did participate, the majority in the study took only one co-op (58) with 45 taking two co-ops, and 46 taking three co-ops during their tenure.

Number of Co-ops	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	40	17.4	17.4	17.4
1	58	25.2	25.2	42.6
2	45	19.6	19.6	62.2
3	46	20.0	20.0	82.2
4	25	10.9	10.9	93.0
5	14	6.1	6.1	99.1
6	1	.4	.4	99.6
7	1	.4	.4	100.0
Total	230	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Number of co-ops.

Grade distribution and relationship to GPA was based on the university standard four-point scale ranging from 0 to 4:

	A = 4.000	A- = 3.667
B+ = 3.333	B = 3.000	B- = 2.667
C+ = 2.333	C = 2.000	

For the purposes of this study grades are calculated to the tenths rather than the university standard of hundredths.

Graduation requirements for the bachelor degree at Northeastern University necessitate that students complete a minimum of 128 semester hours with an overall GPA of 2.000. To investigate for any potential confounding effects associated with grade inflation or grade deflation in the music department over the study period, we conducted an analysis of mean GPA for all music graduates from January 2000 to December 2006 as well a comparative examination of GPA for non-music industry graduates of the music department including music technology, music literature and performance, and music performance students. No evidence of confounding variables in relationship to grade inflation or deflation was found, as seen in table 4.

Variable	N	GPA Mean	Standard Dev.
All Music Majors	280	3.29	0.37
Non-Industry Majors	50	3.38	0.34
Music Industry Majors	230	3.26	0.38

Table 4. Comparison of music department GPA.

The music industry co-op program at Northeastern University begins in the sophomore year and continues through the five-year undergraduate curriculum (comprised of eight semesters of class and three six-month co-op experiences). Students have the flexibility to decide whether or not they wish to participate in the co-op program. If they do participate, they have the added flexibility to determine how many co-ops they wish to undertake. Thus, in reality, the undergraduate experience may be completed in as little as four years or as many as five years of successful academic progression. To participate in the music industry cooperative program, students must have a minimum GPA of 2.00 and carry a sophomore standing. Our sample of 230 graduates was representative of Northeastern University's music industry population. The variable specifications for the sample are found in panel A of table 5.

It must be noted that in 2002, Northeastern University underwent a significant structural change from quarters to semesters. This transition to the semester system was initiated to improve the university's curriculum and position the university among other similarly ranked higher education

institutions in the United States. President Richard Freeland in a meeting with the university faculty senate explained that one reason the transition from quarters to semesters was undertaken was to assimilate “the classroom experience with the co-op experience through the integrated model by which each college links with what goes on with co-op” (Vigeant, 2002). In regard to the cooperative experience, this institutional shift changed the nature of co-ops, from three-, six- or nine-month options to a strictly six-month co-op cycle between six-month classroom periods.

Method

From this sample group we constructed test groups based on the number of co-ops taken during a student’s tenure in the program. To control for differences in a student’s GPA, participants in the study were placed into two groups based on co-op participation.

Group 1 consisted of students who had not completed a co-op during their tenure at Northeastern University. The sample for this study consists of 40 students comprised of 15 females (37.5%) and 25 males (62.5%). The average matriculation age was 19.4 years (S.D. 2.295) and ranged from 18 to 30 years. Average graduation age for this group was 22.65 (S.D. 2.007) and ranged from 21 years to 32 years. Variable specifications and descriptive statistics for the sample are provided in panel B of table 5.

Group 2 consisted of students who had completed at least one co-op during their tenure at Northeastern University. The cooperative students in many respects were somewhat similar to their non-co-op graduating cohorts; see panel C for summary. This control group consisted of 190 students, 64 were female and 126 male. (33.7% and 66.3% respectively) The average matriculation age was 18.59 and the average age at graduation was 22.7. Further detail of this cohort is found in table 6.

After all data were verified, the 230 cases were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software. Runs were made for descriptive statistics, analysis of variance, and bivariate correlation.

Results

We began by examining the effect of cooperative education on the entire sample population, comparing average GPA across all co-op and non-co-op students. The average graduation GPA of non-co-op students was 3.29 (s.d. 0.37). The GPA of co-op students was 3.26, marginally lower than the average GPA of non-co-op students. When the co-op sample was

Variable	Definition	Panel A: All Graduates January 2000 to December 2006		Panel B: Non Co-op Graduates January 2000 to December 2006		Panel C: Co-op Graduates January 2000 to December 2006	
		N	Mean (Stand. Dev)	N	Mean (Stand. Dev)	N	Mean (Stand. Dev)
Gender	All	230	100	40	100	190	100
	Females	80	34.8 (.50)	15	37.5 (.50)	65	33.7 (.50)
	Males	150	65.2 (.50)	25	62.5 (.50)	125	66.3 (.50)
Age	Mat. Age	230	18.73 (1.59)	40	19.4 (2.29)	190	18.59 (19.4)
	Grad. Age	230	22.69 (1.45)	40	22.65 (2.07)	190	22.70 (2.01)
Co-op	Co-op participation	190	3.26 (.037)	0	0 (0.00)	190	3.26 (.037)
	1 co-op	58	****	****	****	58	****
	2 co-op	45	****	****	****	45	****
	3 co-op	46	****	****	****	46	****
GPA	Student's cumulative college grade point average; 4 point scale	230	****	40	****	190	****
	Pre-final GPA	230	3.25 (.43)	40	3.28 (0.41)	190	3.25 (0.41)
	Final GPA	230	3.26 (0.38)	40	3.29 (0.37)	190	3.26 (0.37)

Table 5. Variable definitions and descriptive statistics for total sample, no co-op graduates and co-op graduates.

Variable	Definition	Panel A: Single Co-op Graduates 2000 to 2006		Panel B: Double Co-op Graduates 2000 to 2006		Panel C: Triple Co-op Graduates 2000 to 2006	
		N	Mean (Stand. Dev)	N	Mean (Stand. Dev)	N	Mean (Stand. Dev)
Gender	All	58	100 (.50)	45	100 (.50)	46	100 (.50)
	Females	21	36.2 (.50)	17	37.8 (.50)	14	30.4 (.50)
	Males	37	63.8 (.50)	28	62.2 (.50)	32	69.6 (.50)
Age	Mat. Age	58	18.95 (1.58)	45	18.75 (1.33)	46	18.41 (1.35)
	Grad. Age	58	22.59 (1.32)	45	22.82 (1.34)	46	22.57 (1.31)
GPA	Pre-final GPA	58	3.19 (0.38)	45	3.18 (0.47)	46	3.30 (0.31)
	Final GPA	58	3.21 (0.35)	45	3.22 (0.43)	46	3.30 (0.32)

Table 6. Variable definitions and descriptive statistics for co-op graduates.

broken down by year we observed a change in the GPA mean over a period of time. Those who had completed one co-op had a reduction in GPA of .083 points to 3.21. After two co-ops the average GPA sample remained at 3.21. However, after three co-ops the mean GPA increased to 3.30. Although there were marginal differences in the mean GPA, this analysis of variance indicated no statistically significant difference in student GPA among rating categories.

In a second step, GPA and co-op participation means were analyzed using independent sample t-test procedure. The results, as shown in table 7, indicate a very low significance in the GPA among the sample groups. This was confirmed by testing the total sample using a χ^2 test which indicates a weak relationship between the variables ($\chi^2 = 115.322$ $df = 7$ $p < 0.001$).

Variable	N	GPA Mean (S.D.)
No Co-op	40	3.29515 (0.39)
1 Co-op	58	3.21129 (0.34)
Difference t-value		.083857 1.102
No Co-op	40	3.29515 (0.39)
2 Co-op	45	3.22233 (0.43)
Difference t-value		0.07282 0.815
No Co-op	40	3.29515 (0.39)
3 Co-op	46	3.29796 (0.32)
Difference t-value		-0.00281 -0.036
No Co-op	40	3.29515 (0.39)
All Co-op	190	3.26204 (0.36)
Difference t-value		.033108 0.503

Table 7. T-Value test between co-op and non-co-op groups.

A test was carried out to examine the relationship between cooperative education and GPA. Bivariate correlations were calculated for each group measuring age at graduation against final GPA. This test was used to assess the impact of age on co-op participation and academic performance. With 67% of the students included in our analysis younger than 24 years old at graduation (see table 1), we expected to see a reduction in the final GPA, since the maturity level of the older students should have an impact on academic performance. This expectation did not appear to be the case, as our correlation coefficients indicate that age is not a useful predictor of co-op performance. Even with the highest coefficient ($r = .379$) it is evident that age accounts for only 14% ($r = .144$) of the factors which influence overall GPA. Further, χ^2 test indicates a weak relationship between the variables ($\chi^2 = 100.677$ $df = 15$ $p = <0.001$). See table 8.

Graduation Age and GPA Cross tabulation

		Grad Age (Banded)						Total
		<= 22	23 - 24	25 - 26	27 - 28	29 - 30	31+	
Final	<= 2.500	1	0	3	0	1	0	5
GPA (Banded)	2.501 - 3.000	12	31	5	2	0	0	50
	3.001 - 3.500	64	38	4	2	0	0	108
	3.501 - 4.000	43	21	1	1	0	1	67
Total		120	90	13	5	1	1	230

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	100.677(a)	15	.000
Likelihood Ratio	49.697	15	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.006	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	230		

a. 17 cells (70.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .02.

Table 8. Graduation age and GPA relationship.

Discussion

The data reported in this study suggest that while experiential education may help students master the material presented in a course, there is no significant statistical correlation between participation in cooperative education and improved academic performance as measured by GPA. Of the students who participated in the cooperative program there are no clear,

broad-based, or synergistic benefits for subsequent academic studies in general. Contrary to Koehler (1974), the cumulative GPA of co-op students declined minimally after participating in the music industry co-op program. The mean GPA returned to non-co-op levels after three co-ops. However, this research cohort sample is too small to have any statistical implication. Gender also showed no reflection on GPA performance. Although the sample had a greater number of males than females, their performance in all study groups yielded limited or statistically insignificant correlation to an improved GPA. Age also had little or no relevance on performance. Maturity of students may have an influence on other qualitative measures not examined in this study such as self-efficacy, reduction of anxiety, and the ability to deal with ambiguity.

Nonetheless, the process of examining the relationship between GPA and experiential education is instructive. These findings indicate that both experiential practitioners and music industry employers should resist the temptation to use academic indicators, such as GPA, as predictors of non-academic achievement. Furthermore, this study affirms the theory that experiential education should not be designed to shape classic didactic methodology but rather should be used to shape practice-based learning performance.

Limitations and Implications for Research

Although the issue of music industry cooperative education participation and its relationship to GPA was studied with great detail, this study has limitations that should be recognized, and that could lead to further research. First, the data examined pertained to a sample of students from a single institution and may not be generalized to other universities. Northeastern University is an institution renowned for its cooperative education program. Most students that attend the university cite the co-op program as a reason for choosing Northeastern. Furthermore, students who attend the university are prepared for their experiential education. A study of an institution that does not have experiential education as part of its identity would provide a better picture of the motivational factors associated with undertaking experiential experiences. Third, there are several confounding variables that are not included in this study that could have an effect on GPA. These include the maturity of a student, self-efficacy, and a student's ability to deal with ambiguity.

Although the findings of this study are instructive in assessing the relationship between experiential education and academic performance, there are implications from this research that warrant further investigation. Previous research that found a correlation between experiential education and academic performance utilized large samples. A future study that uses a larger sample with national or international scope would be able to present results more generalizable. A further study focusing on the impact of participation in co-op on GPA for major-specific coursework might explain the results reported here in greater clarity. Other areas for future research should include a closer examination of the internship experience, such as application of music industry skills, types of co-op experiences that employers find most valuable, and skills developed indirectly through the experience such as reduction of anxiety, the ability to deal with ambiguity, and self-efficacy.

Endnotes

- ¹ Co-op, or cooperative education, is an educational model that allows students to complete at least six-months of full-time employment related to their majors or interests while still an undergraduate. The first full-time work experience usually takes place in the spring of a student's sophomore year. A student who completes a typical full co-op program will intersperse three six-month co-ops with eight semesters of class.

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