

VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

2015 USDA Intern Survey Report

Office of Human Resources Management

USDA

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Introduction

The United States Department of Agriculture has maintained a commitment to its future leaders by continuing to evaluate, enhance, and revitalize its Internship Program to reach a variety of goals. To name a few, USDA's OPM approved Internship Programs have increased diversity, fostered knowledge transfer, built alliances between external partners, and continues to provide Federal work experiences for students in many of USDA's mission critical occupations.

With this in mind, the Office of Human Resources Management understands the value of getting feedback from interns. Therefore, an annual survey is conducted to assess strategies, procedures, and program requirements in an effort to ensure that USDA's Internship Programs produce deliverables that appropriately link program requirements to the attainment of USDA's strategic goals. Moreover, the overall purpose of the annual survey is to continually evaluate the internship experience, identify areas for improvement, and make recommendations to enhance the internship experience for all USDA students.

Methods

An online questionnaire was administered to assess satisfaction with USDA's OPM approved Internship Programs. The Virtual University developed the survey and provided a web link to USDA's Student Employment Program Manager, USDA's Pathways Senior Advisor, and Students Coordinators from USDA's Agencies and Staff Offices. The link was forwarded to students for completion. One hundred and forty Interns completed the survey. The survey included questions that ranked student satisfaction with various aspects of the application process, the on-boarding process, students' reasons for applying for an internship at USDA, and other components of the overall internship experience.

For many survey questions, a Likert-type scale was used to determine employee satisfaction with the internship experience. For example, many questions were designed as, 'Very Favorable', 'Somewhat Favorable', 'Favorable', 'Somewhat Unfavorable', 'Unfavorable', and 'I am not sure'. One of the survey questions also included an open-ended comment section in order to elicit a more detailed opinion of the internship experience. Both the quantitative and qualitative survey data collected for this evaluation are detailed in the findings below.

Results

The evaluation results are organized according to the survey question topics and common themes that emerged from both the quantitative data and the qualitative comment sections.

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Participation

Of 140 respondents, a large percentage of the respondents who completed the survey were from Forest Service (FS). The data reveals that Interns from the (FS) ranked first (50.70%) in terms of the number of Interns participating in the survey. The Agricultural Research Service ranked second (10.56%) in terms of participation.

In comparison to the 2014 Intern Survey, more Interns from the National Agricultural Statistics Service ranked first with (63.18%) of participants and Forest Service ranked second with (31.58%) of participants.

Orientation Experience

The majority of respondents rated their orientation experience as very favorable (36.43%), favorable (24.29%), and somewhat favorable (17.86%). In total, (78.58%) of the respondents rated their orientation experience as favorable.

In 2014, the majority of respondents rated their orientation experience as very favorable (37.82%), favorable (32.84%), and somewhat favorable (15.03%). In total, (85.69%) of the respondents rated their orientation experience as favorable in 2014.

Participating in Onboarding Activities

When asked “how soon were you able to participate in the USDA Onboarding Activities”, the majority of respondents indicated (40.31%) within 1-3 days, (24.03%) indicated 4-14 days, and (16.28%) of the respondents indicated within a month of being hired.

In 2014, when asked “how soon were you able to participate in the USDA Onboarding Activities”, the majority of respondents indicated (36.87%) within 1-3 days, (29.61%) indicated 4-14 days, and (16.75%) of the respondents indicated within a month of being hired.

Pathways Participant Agreement

An overwhelming number of Pathways participants (72.73%) kept a copy of their Pathways Participant Agreement. Compared to 2014, the majority of respondents (71.16%) kept a copy of their USDA Pathways Programs Participation Agreement. This particular question did not apply to all Interns.

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Mentoring Experience

The majority of respondents (72.03%) found their mentoring experience to be either very favorable (44.06%) or somewhat favorable (27.97%).

Compared to the 2014 survey results, the majority of respondents (73.37%) found their mentoring experience to be either very favorable (41.71%) or somewhat favorable (31.66%).

Aglearn Participation

Out of 142 respondents, (28.58%) of the respondents completed the USDA Training Plan and (11.97%) of the respondents were planning to complete the training plan soon. The results also revealed that (31.69%) of the respondents either do not know how to locate the training plan or did not complete the USDA Training Plan.

Compared to the 2014 survey results, (31.98%) of the respondents took advantage of the training plan in AgLearn. A few (13.20%) of the respondents were planning to complete the training plan soon. The results also revealed that (55.33%) of the respondents either did not know how to locate the training plan or did not complete the USDA Training Plan.

Individual Development Plan

Out of 140 responses, (31.43%) of Interns completed an Individual Development Plan while (52.14%) of the respondents did not complete an Individual Development Plan.

Compared to the 2014 results, the majority of Interns (36.69%) indicated that they did not complete an Individual Development Plan (IDP). There were also respondents (40.72%) who indicated that they had completed an Individual Development Plan (IDP).

This question does not apply to all USDA Interns, especially Interns who do not have an E-Auth account to complete an IDP. Moreover, only Pathways participants are required to complete an IDP, although all Interns are encouraged to complete one.

Individual Development Plan Process

The results revealed that (27.14%) of the respondents found the IDP process to be easy and (3.57%) of the respondents found the IDP process to be difficult. Seventy eight (55.71%) of the respondents were not sure how to answer the question. This is attributed

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to the fact that the majority of summer Interns are not required to complete an IDP because they are on board for less than 90 days.

In 2014, the results revealed that (35.38%) of the respondents found the IDP process to be easy to understand and (8.21%) of the respondents found the IDP process to be difficult. Eighty nine (45.64%) of the respondents were not sure how to answer the question.

Training Workshops

The results of the survey reveal that (65.65%) of the respondents recommend workshops pertaining to USDA Careers and (51.15%) of the respondents recommend workshops pertaining to Professional Development Strategies. Likewise, (44.27%) of the respondents recommend workshops pertaining to Pathways Programs resources and (45.80%) of the respondents recommend workshops pertaining to Pathways Programs requirements. It should be noted that workshops pertaining to USDA Careers and professional development strategies were provided to 2015 USDA Interns.

The results of the 2014 survey revealed that (65.10%) of the respondents recommended workshops pertaining to USDA Careers and (48.44%) of the respondents recommended workshops pertaining to Professional Development Strategies. Likewise, (47.40%) of the respondents recommended workshops pertaining to Pathways Programs Resources and (44.79%) of the respondents recommended workshops pertaining to Pathways Programs requirements.

Performance Feedback

The results of the survey reveal that the majority of respondents (57.04%) rate their knowledge of the performance feedback process as very knowledgeable (15.49%) or somewhat knowledgeable (41.55%). Others, (16.20%) of the respondents were not knowledgeable about the performance feedback process. This may be attributed to the fact that performance feedback is not a requirement for summer Interns who are on board for less than 90 days. It should be noted that agencies are making strides in providing performance feedback, as the majority of respondents were either very or somewhat knowledgeable about the process.

The results of the 2014 survey revealed that the majority of respondents (64.93%) rated their knowledge of the performance feedback process as very knowledgeable or somewhat

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knowledgeable. Others, (31.16%) of the respondents were not knowledgeable about the performance feedback process. This may be attributed to the fact that performance feedback is not a requirement for summer Interns who are on board for less than 90 days.

USDA AS A CAREER

An overwhelming number of respondents (79.72%) of the respondents indicated that they were considering a career at USDA. A portion of the respondents (14.69%), indicated that they were not sure about a career at USDA. A few, (6.29%) indicated that they were not considering a career at USDA.

In 2014, (73.87%) of the respondents indicated that they were considering a career at USDA. A portion of the respondents (18.08%) indicated that they were not sure about a career at USDA.

Question 12 Open Ended Comments: When asked “What were the highlights of your internship experience?” A majority of the responses were favorable. **A few of the responses are as follows:**

“Just being selected for this great opportunity. I am looking forward for what is to come.”

“Spending time in the field”

“Having an amazing supervisor who is genuinely interested in teaching me.”

“The field work.”

“On job training, flexibility, see a lot of different areas within FSIS”

“Getting field experience directly related to my major and networking with professionals from different organizations.”

“Working with a supportive and considerate team and supervisors”

In 2014, when asked “What were the highlights of your internship experience?” this question received a 100% response rate. A majority of the responses were favorable. **A few of the responses are as follows:**

“Getting out in the field everyday”

“Meeting new people new experiences”

I learned a lot and met extraordinary amounts of people that have helped me learn and understand my job”

“All of the fun intern activities and buzz meetings”

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"My project leader's interest and dedication to my personal and career development"

"Group activities with Interns"

Recommending USDA to A Friend

An overwhelming number of respondents (87.41%) indicated that they would recommend USDA to a friend. A few (11.19%) of the respondents indicated that they were not sure if they would recommend USDA to a friend. A small percentage (3.50%) of respondents indicated that they would not recommend USDA to a friend.

In 2014, the results that (86.3%) of respondents would recommend a USDA internship to a friend. A fewer percentage (6.6%) of the respondents indicated that they would not recommend a USDA internship to a friend.

2015 Highlights

The following highlights are based on the information gathered in support of this evaluation and serve to provide information that can be used to improve the USDA Internship experience.

- **USDA Interns find the orientation experience favorable;**
- **The majority USDA Interns participate in an orientation activity within 1-14 days of onboarding;**
- **Many USDA Interns continue to keep a copy of their Pathways Agreement;**
- **Many USDA Interns had contact with a mentor during their internship;**
- **Many USDA Interns took advantage of the training opportunities in AgLearn;**
- **Many USDA Interns continue to be interested in workshops;**
- **Many USDA Interns remain knowledgeable about and have received performance feedback;**
- **Many USDA Interns remain committed to considering a career at USDA.**
- **USDA Interns remain committed to recommending USDA to a friend; and**
- **Many USDA reveal that they are receiving meaningful work experiences**

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- **I recommend including workshops and seminars on the Individual Development Plan Process. I developed and distributed the Strategies for Success Guide for Interns. It contains detailed information on the IDP Plan Process.**
- **I recommend offering Interns informational materials on the completion of IDP's. The Success Guide that was distributed contains an IDP worksheet.**
- **I recommend continuing to make the USDA Intern Training Plans more visible and accessible. I developed and distributed the Strategies for Success Guide for Interns. It contains detailed information on the USDA Intern Training Plans.**
- **I recommend continuing to offer flash mentoring events and activities that foster professional development. The flash mentoring events that were held this summer were great. Also, the welcome event held this year included a USDA Careers introduction component.**

For more information regarding this survey, please contact Carol Scott at carol.scott@dm.usda.gov or at 202-260-8364.

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