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**CAREER IMMERSION PRIOR TO GRADUATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
EFFICACY OF STUDENT MARKETING AGENCIES**

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CAREER IMMERSION PRIOR TO GRADUATION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
EFFICACY OF STUDENT MARKETING AGENCIES

by

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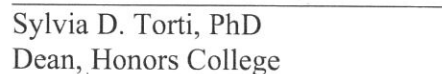
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ABSTRACT

Modern college graduates are faced with a hiring paradox: employers are more willing to hire workers with experience, but college graduates lack professional experience when they graduate. Many educational disciplines encourage experiential work as a solution to this problem. In the marketing industry, student agencies offer an environment that simulates the setting of a professional marketing industry. Students receive professional guidance and execute real work for a variety of clients. This thesis will explore the processes and benefits associated with student agencies in order to determine the experiential value that they deliver to students involved. A combination of academic research and marketing research in the form of interviewing will analyze the efficacy of such institutions in graduate career placement. This analysis will provide recommended improvements for AdThing, the student agency at the University of Utah.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite years of undergraduate study and receiving a diploma, many recent graduates are faced with a career paradox: employers are only willing to hire new entrants with field experience, yet graduates have no way to gain that experience without being hired. This conundrum holds true in the marketing and advertising industry, preventing many recent marketing graduates from attaining the career for which they have spent years preparing. In order to mitigate this challenge, several universities have implemented student marketing agencies that allow students to learn and apply marketing skills with real industry clients. Participating in such platforms provides students with the necessary experience before they graduate. While these agencies are becoming more common, those currently established vary in structure and execution.

This thesis will analyze and compare student marketing agencies while measuring the efficacy of such programs in relation to the students, universities, and clients involved. This strategy will combine methods of interviewing, academic researching, and analyzing the actual execution of student work at the University of Utah student marketing agency, AdThing. The self-directed project will compare agencies, examine the operation of the creative process in the context of advertising campaigns and other marketing, and study the success of individuals who participated in the programs after graduation. It will delve into client impressions and expectations of the work done by the agencies. It will investigate the types of students involved in these programs as well as faculty participation. Finally, it will assess the outcomes of hands-on, experiential platforms and their benefits in higher learning. The analysis will provide

recommendations for AdThing to improve its operation and increase the value it delivers to students.

I hypothesize that the value of such experiential programs will be highly beneficial to industry professionals who participated in the agencies as students. I also anticipate the creative processes and client interaction to differ by student agency and thus meet varying levels of success. This thesis will quantify the success of immersive programs using metrics that will be advantageous to employers and other shareholders in the marketing industry, as well as students seeking to gain relevant experience prior to graduation. These findings will be directly applied to AdThing.

VALUE OF WORK EXPERIENCE

After several years, thousands of dollars, innumerable hours of study and preparation, and dozens of grueling examinations, nearly four million Americans will graduate with various college degrees each year (National Center for Education Statistics). Despite such a sizeable number of graduates, an alarming 44 percent of them are underemployed in the workforce. Students choose to attend college to improve their job prospects, seeking jobs that will allow them to pay off almost \$1.3 trillion in student loans spread out among 43 million borrowers. The average student has over \$35,000 in student debt, and a large portion of these graduates are unable to get jobs that will allow them to pay off their loans and have a secure financial future (Arruda). College graduates today are faced with a career paradox: employers are only willing to hire new entrants with field experience, but graduates have difficulty gaining that experience without being hired.

The lack of hiring today stems in large part from employers viewing graduates as unprepared for the workforce. Employers believe that colleges and universities today are not arming students with the skills necessary to foster success in a work environment. Only 14 percent of employers believe that most new graduates are prepared for work, while only 53 percent consider half of graduates to be prepared. Employers seek applicants with both field-specific knowledge and a broad range of skills (O'Shaughnessy). A study by Hart Research Associates reveals that there is a large gap between the information and skills college students are learning and the outcome employers wish to see in a work environment. When a graduate is able to demonstrate how he or she can create value within the organization when hired, the gap is bridged.

This value is largely affected by how and where the student learned working skills. Employers value work experience such as internships and other applied-learning involvement in the industry as the most effective atmosphere in which to teach such skills and bridge the gap (Singh). University disciplines are beginning to implement experiential learning in order to meet this need.

Experience in applied learning is rare within the graduate population. The National Association of Colleges and Employers discovered that only 1.5 million internships are filled annually in the United States. Fewer than 10 percent of college graduates gain internship experience, but 70 percent of employers think it should be required to complete applied-learning projects in order to graduate (Singh). This dichotomy is often responsible for difficulties student face when entering the workforce.

Peter Cappelli, a professor at The Wharton School, states, “When employers do hire from college, the evidence suggests that academic skills are not their primary concern. Work experience is the crucial attribute that employers want even for students to have yet to work full-time” (University of Michigan Career Center). Cappelli elaborates on this statement by emphasizing that employers want “workers they don’t have to train”—those with experience prior to graduation (Cappelli). Work experience allows students to become workplace-ready, a concept that involves learning workplace skills. These include soft skills like teamwork and communication as well as technical skills such as deadline management, phone and email etiquette, and collaboration with various ages. Experiential learning also increases differentiation from other candidates in order to compete in a specific business sector, enhances application forms and interviewing skill, and upsurges the possibility of full-time offers. Furthermore, it provides the opportunity

to test out a company, sector, or role to see if it is an appropriate career path (The Institute of Engineering and Technology). These valuable skills cannot be achieved in a classroom-only learning experience.

When students do equip themselves with the skills acquired by work experience, it is beneficial from both an employer and a student perspective. Graduates' resumes and skillsets stand out to prospective employers, who rank internships as the most important attribute in evaluating graduates for hire. Good work experience is also frequently indicative of impressive academic performance (Thompson), but employers place more weight on experience during school than academic credentials in all industries studied by the Chronicle of Higher Education. Weighted results demonstrate that the most important academic credential is college major, but that internships and experience are the top traits desired by employers. Extracurricular activities, athletics, and service are also valued more than students' GPAs. Media and communication-related careers place even more emphasis on experience than other industries (The Chronicle of Higher Education). Regardless of the industry, employers find most value in experienced, workplace-ready hires.

Ninety-four percent of employers are more likely to consider hiring recent college graduates who had an internship or apprenticeship with a company or organization (O'Shaughnessy). Additionally, students actually get a feel for the industry they wish to work in to determine whether it is an optimal fit for them. This can reduce the need for costly and time-consuming career transitions later in life. Gaining work experience to graduation prior to graduation is a critical asset for college students in all fields in terms of career placement. This experience is equally necessary to be hired in the marketing

field, and marketing employers increasingly require employees who have such experience.

CONSOLIDATING TYPES OF STUDENT AGENCIES

Student agencies have been appearing in public and private higher education institutions since the 1970s (BU PRLab). These institutions are unmonitored and are highly varied, so it is somewhat difficult to ascertain the exact number of functioning student agencies in America and internationally. Such agencies include marketing, advertising, and public relations emphases. They differ in terms of structure, procedure, faculty involvement, student incentivizing, level of involvement, type of services rendered, and more. It is important to refer to these agencies as “student agencies” as opposed to “student-run agencies” because not all of them are totally run by students: some of the agencies incorporate a high level of faculty involvement, thus they must be termed ambiguously enough to accommodate the varying levels of student administration.

It can also be difficult to segment these agencies into fields of marketing, advertising, and public relations, because at a university level, the services rendered by each of these agencies overlap or are identical. The American Marketing Association defines marketing as, “The activity, set of institutions, and processes of creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” Marketing agencies are involved with the evolution of a product from its inception to its purchase, encompassing the entire process. The process is executed by focusing on the Marketing Mix, or Four Ps: product, price, place, and promotion. Marketing involves a set of institutions, creation, communication, and delivery. The objective of marketing is to promote and distribute a product or service

to a customer (8THIRTYFOUR Integrated Communications). Agencies that designate their service as “marketing” are generally well-rounded.

According to M: Advertising 2nd Edition 2014, advertising is, “The structured and composed non-personal communication that is usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods, services and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media.” Advertising is non-personal, paid, and persuasive: it is a practice that intends to persuade consumers to purchase a product or service through various mediums (8THIRTYFOUR Integrated Communications). Advertising agencies focus specifically on spreading awareness and promoting campaigns—they often have more specific services.

And finally, public relations (PR) is termed as “A strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationship between organizations and their publics” by the Public Relations Society of America. The main intention of public relations is to build and maintain relationships that are beneficial to organizations and to the public based on communications and mutual benefits (8THIRTYFOUR Integrated Communications). This business-consumer relationship is core competency of PR agencies, and they tend to be highly communication based.

Integrated, strategic communications combine the intentions of promoting and distributing products and services, persuading customers to invest in products or services, and solidifying relationships between customers and firms. Professional, established agencies segment specifically into one category in order to specialize their services. However, most student agencies, whether they be technically termed as marketing, advertising, or PR, aim to achieve all of these objectives to provide a broader range of

services to clients. A 2011 study found that 51 percent of student agencies describe themselves as focusing on integrated communications, about 33 percent focus mainly on PR, and 9 percent on advertising (Bush and Miller, U.S. Student-Run Agencies: Organization, Attributes and Advisor Perceptions of Student Learning Outcomes).

This thesis examines each of these types of student agencies as one category of institution: student agencies, specifically student marketing agencies, because the marketing label encompasses the entire process, including advertising and PR.

COMPONENTS OF A STUDENT AGENCY

Student agencies are entities established within colleges and universities that are modeled after professional marketing, advertising, and public relation agencies that employ students as the workforce. The agency is associated with the college or university where it was founded and allows students the opportunity to gain work experience by stimulating the work environment of the industry that they will face upon graduating. These agencies are established by faculty of the university that have industry experience and are involved in the student agencies to varying degrees. Students are involved in strategic analysis, account management, and creative development of real work for actual clients. This includes conceiving, developing, and executing campaigns and branding that raise awareness of products or services to benefit the client in question.

FACULTY

Student agencies often involve an industry professional who is passionate about bringing marketing experience and expertise to students. One or more faculty members begins an agency on campus modeled after professional agencies and recruits students to join. The faculty member oversees the program and ensures its continuation over the years by facilitating a turnover of student involvement. They sometimes participate heavily in the creative process and execution of campaigns as well as securing clients, and sometimes they merely offer guidance and allow the students to run the operation themselves. The faculty is often involved in client interactions, specifically those concerning finances. The faculty also provides connections to professionals in the workforce for professional mentoring and networking connections.

A study published in the *Public Relations Review* revealed that while student agencies possess processes and qualities similar to professional agencies, many fell short in areas of business procedures such as client fees, budgeting, and billing. It suggested that faculty involvement is the key to mitigating these business problems. Agencies were more likely to have successful business procedures if they were more closely tied to faculty and academic departments due to the resources and support those connections provide (Bush and Miller, U.S. Student-Run Agencies: Organization, Attributes and Advisor Perceptions of Student Learning Outcomes). Faculty support is a critical component of a successful agency, and faculty interaction is often integral to student learning experiences.

STUDENTS

The students in agencies are similar to other students who choose participate in extracurricular activities on campus: they enjoy being involved in their surroundings and engaging in the additional opportunities a college education offers. Students bring drive and ambition to the agencies as well as a fresh, future-oriented mindset. This millennial mindset brings a perspective that businesses find extremely valuable to their marketing.

Students involved in extracurricular activities seek a well-rounded college experience. They strive to be involved and interact with other students and to identify with a peer group, which positively affects their behavior and cognitive development. It positively impacts students' emotional, intellectual, social, and interpersonal development, which in turn maximizes academic and personal development. Students are better able to negotiate, communicate, manage conflict, and lead than other students on

campus. These students are generally more confident, autonomous, and appreciative of others' differences (Education Encyclopedia). It is necessary for students to have these traits in order to commit the time and effort necessary to have a successful agency.

The students who comprise agencies often vary in personality and abilities. Some are more creative and some are more business, process-oriented. However, these students share a common ambition and desire to be a part of something impactful during their undergraduate education.

SIZE AND STRUCTURE

Size and structure of student agencies often depends upon how long the entity has been established. Agencies typically start with a handful of students then grow to whatever capacity the program desires and are frequently selective in the students involved as the program grows. Agencies can employ anywhere from fewer than ten to over one hundred students. The structure of agencies is usually hierarchal and team-oriented. A small number of student leadership will oversee involvement in disciplines such as account services, creative, strategy and other areas. Agencies will often establish teams that are client-specific and are comprised of some students in each discipline.

Account management students facilitate interaction with the clients and manage projects. They will schedule meetings, communicate via phone and email, and discover what client needs must be met. Creative students include designers and copywriters who execute creative deliverables such as digital ads, posters, fliers, videos, radio spots, and more. Other students who are involved include strategists who plan with the client and decipher target audiences and the best way to reach them, project managers who ensure

that each project is on track and meeting deadlines, and operations managers who coordinate the inner workings of the agency. The amount students in each discipline and their responsibilities vary according to agency.

A study published in the *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* proposed that student agencies can be sorted into three categories. Type 1 agencies demonstrate high student accountability, often require credit hours, and have mandatory team meetings. They have high faculty involvement, rigid structure and protocol, and competitive applications. They also have dedicated office space and the ability to bill clients. This leads to a low risk of dissolving. Type 2 agencies have lower student accountability and often only require team meetings. There is fairly high faculty involvement, titled structure, some business protocols, a non-competitive application process, a shared space, and primarily non-profit clients. The stability of these agencies is based on faculty involvement, leading to a medium risk of dissolving. Finally, Type 3 agencies have no financial structure, few to no required meetings, and little accountability for students. They demonstrate top-level only titles, few business protocols, and are volunteer-based and managed as a student organization. They often do not have dedicated space and they do only pro-bono work. Sensitivity to changes in student leadership lead to a high risk of dissolving (Bush, Student Public Relations Agencies: A Qualitative Study of the Pedagogical Benefits, Risks, and a Framework for Success).

The risk of dissolution is a serious threat to student agencies that aren't as structured and established. Bush and Miller found that more than 20 percent of the agencies they surveyed have been dissolved and recreated (Bush and Miller, U.S. Student-Run Agencies: Organization, Attributes and Advisor Perceptions of Student

Learning Outcomes). This statistic illustrates the importance of stability, structure, and accountability in agencies. Agencies must maintain permanency in order to grow and become more effective, consequently benefiting more students.

Agency sizes differ depending on which institution they are associated with. A study of agencies listed by the Accredited Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, which is not a comprehensive list but is a sample reflective of the population of student agencies, brackets them into size categories of small, midsize, and large. Small agencies comprise 0-25 members, midsize have 26-50 members, and large have more than 51 members. Of ACEJMC agencies, 42 percent did not provide information on agency size. Of those that did provide information, 28 percent were midsized, 22 percent were small, and only 8 percent were large. There was also a correlation between founding dates and agency size. 75 percent of small agencies were founded in the last six years or before 2007 at the time of the study, 40 percent of midsized agencies were founded earlier than 2007, and all large agencies were founded earlier than 2007. The study concluded that agencies grow over time (Busch).

SERVICES

The services rendered by student agencies change according to client needs. Some clients require initial identity branding, positioning, and campaign ideas, while others might just need assistance advertising a specific product to a certain demographic. Examples of typical services rendered include strategic positioning, identity branding, logo and typeface development, digital advertising, radio spots, social media, organizing and executing events, full campaigns, press releases, graphic design, media relations,

print advertising, website development, blogging, newsletters, video production, broadcast commercials, and more (Limoges).

Agencies often require monetary procedures to accompany their services. Financial procedures also vary according to agency, but this information can be difficult to attain. In the previously mentioned ACEJMC agency study, over half of the agencies did not provide information about their financial structures or whether their work was pro-bono or fee-based. Those who did provide information included 32 percent that applied costs to their services (Busch). These fees are not the central focus of student agencies: any money made from clients directly benefits the program and is not integral to agency operations.

Another critical internal function that supplements agency services is self-branding. Self-branding and promotion are also critical in gaining clients and growing agencies. While most of these agencies have a physical presence and reputation on campus, one of the main ways they promote themselves to other students and the general public is online and through social media. In regard to websites, 75 percent of agencies purchase a custom domain name (e.g., www.yournamehere.com). Only 15 percent use a subdomain (e.g., www.yourname.wordpress.com) and 10 percent use pages associated with their university (e.g., www.college/edu/agency). Agencies also have active presences on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The most popular is Facebook, where 95 percent of agencies have pages, followed by 97.5 percent with Twitter accounts and 22.5 percent with YouTube accounts. Other platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest and Foursquare were present for less than 5 percent of agencies (Busch).

CLIENTS

As with services and structure, clients are different for each agency. Most clients are small businesses, nonprofits, or local branches of organizations, but oftentimes larger clients will elicit services from student agencies. The client can be a singular person like a manager, a department, or a whole organization. There are usually one or two employees whom the agency coordinates with. Sometimes clients approach agencies due to word-of-mouth, and sometimes students or faculty in the agency reach out to potential clients and offer services. Some clients pay for the agency services, but some do not—this depends on the agency's policies. The rate, if present, is frequently much lower than professional agencies. Many student agencies will drastically lower or eliminate the charges for nonprofit businesses or causes that they consider to be important.

GENERAL CAMPAIGN PROCESS

Initially, either the agency will be approached by a client requesting work, or they will reach out to a potential client and offer services. It is also often the case that they simply begin a new project for an existing client. Faculty, students from account management, and often students who are strategists will initially meet with the client to determine what type of campaign the client needs or desires. The students will then take that information and synthesize it internally, completing any necessary research and planning to complete a brief or project plan to present to the team for that account. This plan includes identification of the target market, how best to reach them and over what mediums, how many deliverables are required, a look and feel for the campaign, any client-requirements, etc. Briefs or plans are typically accompanied by a scope of work to

give the client so that they know what to expect in terms of deliverables and payment, and they approve or renegotiate those terms.

The creative team will follow the finalized plan to create and execute different deliverables, or final products to deliver to the client. The account managers will continually communicate with the client to ensure that needs and expectations are being met. A project manager or account person will create deadlines to ensure that the pre-established timeline is being followed. The deliverables may need to go through several rounds before being approved by the internal team, the faculty, and the client.

When the deliverables are ready, the campaign is launched. If the task was merely to create posters, digital ads, or something similar for the client, the students are no longer involved after delivery. However, if social media posts or multiple rounds of advertising are necessary, the students will continuously participate in the campaign as it is executed over time. A certain amount of consulting is often involved, especially for clients with limited marketing experience. The agency offers guidance as to how, when, and what the best way is to communicate the campaign to the target market. Often, campaigns include measuring campaign success by examining click-through rate, increased sales, or some other metric provided by the client.

Students in the agencies also dedicate their time to passion projects and “spec work”—speculative work to practice skills or pitch to clients. These projects are initially internal. Spec work has potential not only to improve the students’ skills, but to gain recognition and attention of external sources as well. These benefits are the reason that many agencies dedicate time and resources to the execution of spec work in addition to meeting client demands.

MEASURING OUTCOMES

It is often difficult to measure student learning outcomes from engaging in student agency experiences as undergraduates for three reasons. First, instructors must allow students a high level of autonomy for experience to be considered applicable to the professional workplace. Second, clients are not always capable of judging the efficacy of student work. And finally, students are frequently reluctant to inform faculty of difficulties, challenges, or team negligence (Swanson). However, a combination of research and anecdotes in the form of student success stories upon graduation allow for results to be measured.

Agency experience on students' resumes adds value and students were able to more quickly obtain internships and secure jobs, sometimes above entry-level (Bush, Student Public Relations Agencies: A Qualitative Study of the Pedagogical Benefits, Risks, and a Framework for Success). A 2016 study found that the most positive aspects of working in a student agency are the opportunity to work with real clients, the importance of universities having agencies, and an increase in student job marketability. The most highly rated skills developed from working in agencies are the ability to work with clients, working in a team structure, and interpersonal skills acquired. Students were also observed gaining confidence, taking on responsibility, solving problems, providing leadership that inspired others to follow, working effectively in teams, and managing deadlines. They learned to negotiate with others and give and accept constructive feedback. Agency work helped students believe they could succeed in a professional setting and critically think in a business environment (Haley, Ritsch and Smith). This

confidence that students are able to gain is an immense benefit of experiential leadership that is often overlooked.

Advisor responses to questions about the experience in a 2016 study were overwhelmingly positive and few of them reported that students were too young to predict outcomes or that effects were neutral. They listed some challenges including keeping students motivated and managing client expectations. The level of time commitment of faculty and advisors correlated with the number of skills students perceived to have developed and having a dedicated office space enhanced the experience (Haley, Ritsch and Smith).

This same 2016 survey studied students in 210 agencies, 75 percent of whom were currently involved in the agency and a quarter of whom had already graduated within the last two years. The results showed that 55.1 percent of students received academic credit for their work and 33.4 percent received neither academic credit nor payment. Over half of students spent 6 hours or fewer in their agency roles per week, 33.7 percent worked 7-14 hours, and 14.4 percent worked over 15 hours (Haley, Ritsch and Smith).

The study examined student opinions on the following experience statements:

- It is important for my college or university to have a student agency
- It was important for my learning to work directly with clients
- It enhanced my marketability as a job candidate
- I feel better prepared for the professional expectations of the workplace
- The experiences allowed me to learn at a deeper level the concepts covered in previous coursework

- Being in a responsible, dedicated job role is/was one of the most valuable things about the experience
- I feel more confident in my abilities
- A student agency should be selective; students should have to apply before being admitted
- I have gained a greater sensitivity for people who are different from me

None of the results varied by gender in a statistically significant manner.

Participants stated that they highly agreed with most statements, especially the fact that agencies are important for colleges and universities and that it was important to work directly with real clients (see Table 1). The only statement that received moderate agreement was that students gain an increased sensitivity to those different than themselves (Haley, Ritsch and Smith). These results quantify the multi-faceted value that students derive from working in a student agency.

Both the statement about learning concepts covered in previous coursework more deeply and the one about feeling more confident in their abilities showed statistically significant differences depending on how many hours the student answering the survey worked per week. Learning previous coursework concepts generated a p-value of .02 because those who worked more than 15 hours per week rated it more highly than those who worked 1-6 and 7-14 hours per week, which did not differ from each other. Those who worked more than 15 hours per week also rated their confidence in abilities higher than those who worked 1-6 hours with a p-value of .02, but those who worked 7-14 hours did not statistically differ from either of the other categories

(Haley, Ritsch and Smith). Both of these differences indicate that working for considerably more time in the agency leads to an enhanced experience.

The participants were also asked to evaluate their perceived enhancement of the following skills:

- Working within a team structure
- Interpersonal skills
- Problem solving
- Leadership
- Writing
- Working with clients
- Understanding new media
- Strategic planning
- Production skills
- Business practices

There were more statistically significant differences in this section than in the experience section (see Table 2). Those who had graduated were more likely to describe their production skills as increased than current students. Number of hours worked affected six of the variables. Those who worked more than 15 hours per week rated working within a team structure higher than those who worked 1-6 hours per week, but those who worked 7-10 hours did not differ. They also rated problem solving, leadership, new media, and production skills higher than those working low hours, and those in mid-category of hours worked did not differ. Skills working with clients were ranked higher by the highest category of hours worked and the mid-category of hours worked than the

low category. All participants indicated only moderate support for the need for exclusive resources (Haley, Ritsch and Smith). Each of these skills participants developed are in accordance with the abilities that employers seek in new hires.

Another survey sent to university agencies nationwide identified three major trends in these agencies: independent workspaces fostered a greater number of formal business practices, agencies affiliated with PRSSA (Public Relations Student Society of America) had been in existence the longest likely because of the support they received, and agencies with paying clients were more targeted in their offered services (Limoges). This analysis was based off of three themes of previous research of the topic:

1. Benefits that come with student involvement in extracurricular activities
2. The purpose of student-run agencies
3. How student-run agencies are different from internships or in-class learning

This research demonstrates the importance of an independent office space, the benefits prolonged establishment which is often bolstered by professional accreditation, and the specification and specialization of agencies with paying clients (Limoges). Each of these are important factors that contribute to an agency's success.

Gaining experience in a student agency results in client interaction experience, job marketability and resume builders, increased skillsets and confidence, leadership and teamwork abilities, relevant work experience, enhanced personal interaction aptitude, and more. These are the skillsets that employers insist new college graduates are lacking, and they are the abilities that lead to desirable jobs upon graduation for students involved in agencies. A student agency is a platform for professional success in marketing at an undergraduate level that is unmatched by any other college learning environment.

THE MARKETING RESEARCH PROCESS

The Marketing Research Process allows researchers to develop a method or process that begins with the question or problem they intend to solve and yields results that lead to an answer or solution. The Marketing Research Process follows these steps:

1. Ask a Question
2. Definition
3. Design
4. Data Collection
5. Decoding
6. Get an Answer

(Smith and Albaum)

The process begins with the question researchers intend to answer. This question should embody the problem that the researcher hopes to learn more about or find a solution to. The question should be asked in an unbiased, open-ended manner (Smith and Albaum). The overarching question in this thesis is, “Do student agencies successfully prepare students involved to be more valuable in the workplace after graduation?”

The definition stage is imperative to the project’s success. This is a managerial interface stage, which means it is internal and is not visible to the participants of the research. In order to properly define the question, the researcher must clarify the research purpose, understand the problem context, specify the research objective, and assess the value of the information (Smith and Albaum). The purpose of this research is to study the impact of the immersive, hands-on atmosphere of a student agency and determine how that affects the marketability and performance of the students involved after they

graduate. The problem context is that students are underprepared for a professional work setting after graduation. The specific objectives are to identify different aspects and types of agencies to determine what skills the students receive and to understand their effects on the students involved to assess how they affect the skillsets and abilities that will make the students professionally successful. Finally, the costs and benefits of participating in a student agency will enable the researcher to assess the value of information.

Following definition is the design stage, which is a customer interface that the people or research involved in the study will be exposed to as part of the process. It typically uses one of three types of research studies. Descriptive studies intend to summarize existing data to draw conclusions. Exploratory studies allow researchers to discover new information. Causal studies create an understanding of the relationship between two variables (Smith and Albaum). This project is an exploratory study that is a combination of a literature search and expert interviews, using both primary and secondary data. Exploratory studies do not require a high level of structure and they help identify important variables. This study explores the aspects of student agencies that affect students involved.

The next step is data collection, which is also a customer interface. In this step, the researcher uses qualitative or quantitative methods to collect enough research data from that target population to analyze. This can include secondary data research, surveys, interviews, A/B tests, and more (Smith and Albaum). The data collected about student agencies is both primary and secondary. The primary data comprises the interview responses and the secondary data is the literature research of preciously conducted research. The interviews followed an interview process that flows in the following order:

1. Greeting
2. Opening
3. Probing
4. Closing

(Smith and Albaum)

The greeting stage is often overlooked in interviews, but it is integral to the process. It allows participants to get comfortable in the interview, gain understanding as to why the interview is being conducted, and give consent to have their results recorded and analyzed. The opening stage then involves building rapport with the participants and creating a pleasant, interesting atmosphere. It often involves asking for descriptive content such as past experiences and basic questions. The probing stage is the central part of the interview which allows the interviewer to gain a more in-depth perspective about the participants' content. Finally, the closing stage discovers whether there is anything else the researcher wishes to add (Smith and Albaum). Following these stages as interview guidelines ensures that the research is conducted in an effective, depth-oriented manner.

The interviews conducted in this research followed the interview process and were conducted in a variety of circumstances to gain a broad sense of content. Some interviews were conducted with older, well-established agencies, and some were fairly new. Some were conducted with current students, some with faculty, and one with a recent graduate (Call) (Kaufmann) (Shanler) (J. Smith). This coverage ensured that there was variety in the perspectives of interviewees and that results were more accurate.

The final step of the marketing research process before answering the question is decoding. Decoding involves analyzing and synthesizing the research to determine patterns and relevancy to draw conclusions. Interpreting the findings allows the researcher to gain the understanding needed to develop a solution. This stage is a managerial interface (Smith and Albaum). The decoding for this study involved analyzing the literature research and interviews. Breaking down the literature research involved determining what information was relevant in success for student agencies and key factors that delivered value for students, as well as examining what outcomes that value might lead to. To assess the interview results, interview recordings were re-examined to record basic information and identify key voices or quotes that alluded to needs or benefits associated with successful agencies and their effects on students (Call) (Kaufmann) (Shanler) (J. Smith). This combination of academic informational findings with anecdotal sentiment yielded the most accurate results describing agency experiences.

AGENCY RESEARCH INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

ADTHING

The control agency in this study is AdThing at the University of Utah. I am currently the Director of Planning at AdThing, a role in strategy and agency leadership that has allowed me to be highly involved and aware of the agency's development and procedures since its inception. This perspective allows me to ascertain AdThing's positioning as a student agency compared to similar institutions.

AdThing was founded one and a half years ago by Bill Oakley, former Chief Creative Officer in the McCann Worldgroup. Structurally, AdThing is broken down into three teams:

1. A creative team of designers, videographers, and copywriters
2. A strategy team of researchers in planners
3. An accounts team of account managers and project managers

AdThing is comprised of about 20 students. The agency includes strategic positioning, identity branding, logo and typeface development, digital advertising, radio spots, social media, full campaigns, press releases, graphic design, media relations, print advertising, website development, video production, broadcast commercials, and more. Different clients require varying scopes of campaigns and deliverables.

AdThing positions itself as, "The ad agency staffed by students, run by pros" (AdThing). This refers to the fact that students within the agency execute the work, but the operation is managed by professionals: Bill Oakley along with an accredited board of consulting professionals. The agency does professional work for industry clients because of their influence and allows its students to learn critical skills in the process. Students are

handpicked by faculty and the rest of the team after undergoing an interview process, so the students involved are talented and capable. AdThing has primarily grown and gained new clients due to word of mouth, the outreach of the faculty involved, and an increasing awareness and reputation on campus. It's branding is simple, clean, and creative and it strives to portray to clients that it offers both professional work and a fresh, millennial perspective.

There are a variety of students who participate in AdThing. Some are marketing majors, some are graphic design or film majors, and some are journalism or communication majors. The students' interests and abilities vary, but the combination of process-oriented, efficient, and creative students working together in an organized manner creates desirable results in client work. The students are incentivized by the possibility of course credit and potential scholarships for those who are particularly involved or are part of team leadership.

AdThing has a streamlined process for client work. Initially, strategy and account teams will go with faculty to meet with the client and interpret what work they desire. Strategy will then write a creative brief, which the creative director will present to the creative team working on that account. Creative and strategic concepting will then begin, determining a scope of work. Once the scope of work is approved and any necessary research is complete, the creative team will execute concepts. When the concepts are approved by the client, creative production begins and is followed by distribution. The process ends with a campaign wrap-up meeting.

Most of the work is paid for by clients. The amount paid varies according to project but is significantly more affordable than professional agencies. The funds cover

expenses for equipment and generate the student scholarship fund. However, AdThing also does work for non-profits and does not require payment. Bill Oakley strives to have at least 25 percent of agency work benefit some type of social cause.

Some examples of client work include campaigns for local restaurants such as Sono Sushi, Alpha Coffee, and Freebirds. These clients vary across industries and target markets. The work AdThing did for Freebirds was recognized by the CEO of the chain and implemented nationally. AdThing also does work for the David Eccles School of Business, an institution home to some of the top business programs in the nation. They have internal university clients such as How We Die, an Honors College Praxis Lab aiming to increase awareness of end-of-life procedures. AdThing has also been instrumental in the rebranding of U Health and University of Utah Health Plans. The students also pursue passion projects, including one related to refugee-acceptance that was recognized by the Huffington Post (AdThing) (see Exhibit 2).

AdThing typically exceeds client expectations and has a positive working relationship with every account as evident in the client responses to the students' work. Gaining this experience and participating in AdThing has been enormously beneficial in teaching students the abilities necessary for professional success. This success has been evident in the form of students getting internships and jobs after graduating at high-caliber firms such as MRM//McCann, Venables Bell and Partners, Adobe, Avalaunch Media, and more.

AdThing falls between a Type 1 and a Type 2 agency (Bush, Student Public Relations Agencies: A Qualitative Study of the Pedagogical Benefits, Risks, and a Framework for Success). It demonstrates relatively high student accountability and has

high faculty involvement, an office space, and the ability to bill clients. It only requires team meetings and has a titled structure and an unstructured yet competitive application process. This positioning demonstrates the agency's opportunities for improvement, including solidifying its application process and increasing student accountability and participation.

ADCATS

AdCats at the University of Arizona is also comprised of about 20 people and has been operating since 2008. Jacob Smith, the President, joined during his sophomore year despite the fact that he is a finance major. AdCats targets small businesses and nonprofits in the Tucson area that lack a marketing budget. Participants enjoy this club as opposed to others because it involves real work instead of just hypothetical scenarios. Most of the members are marketing majors, but there are some art and other diverse majors as well (J. Smith).

The club has an executive board of 5 people and a design team that is very locally focused and is intent on helping the community, which in turn benefits participants. "Now I have those hard skills because I sit there and talk with the leaders of businesses and nonprofits in the community and figure out what they want and then execute (J. Smith)." The club focuses on rebranding, pamphlet design work, low-budget television commercials, social media, and design. They brand themselves and raise awareness through cold-calling potential clients, active social media, a strong campus presence, and involvement with other clubs. They were voted #1 Most Outstanding Small Organization

in the Business School. They generally meet once a week and turn projects over in under a month (J. Smith).

Some examples of work completed for clients includes a rebranding, literature, and a low-budget commercial for Helping Hands for Single Moms, which provides scholarships and daycares for single moms in college. Another client example is a restaurant called Tucson Tamale; AdCats helped it attract customers to other locations besides the popular campus one. AdCats is also heavily involved with on-campus clubs. AdCats tends to exceed client expectations through a learning process, which allows it to retain clients (AdCats).

The head of the marketing department advises the AdCats and brings in clients, and a major university donor from the marketing industry is also involved. Students do not receive any incentive for joining beyond the experience. All work is entirely pro-bono and there is no financial structure (J. Smith). Without paying clients, the industry does not fully simulate the atmosphere of a professional agency.

Some benefits for AdCats students include being able to talk about what they've done in interviews, application to multiple types of careers, positive publicity that is associated with the agency, and company hiring outreach. Their students attain successful careers in advertising, start-up companies, and sales jobs in various cities (J. Smith).

AdCats is in between a Type 2 and Type 3 agency (Bush, Student Public Relations Agencies: A Qualitative Study of the Pedagogical Benefits, Risks, and a Framework for Success). Despite operating for 9 years, it has normal student accountability, less structure, and fewer required meetings. It has no financial structure and top-level only titles. AdCats could improve this positioning by developing a clear

workflow and defining positions for all members of the organizations. Introducing paying clients would better represent the atmosphere that students will face after graduation and improve the efficacy of the agency.

THE AGENCY

The Agency at the University of Florida is much larger, with over 100 students on staff even though it has only running for 2 and a half years. Kelli Kaufmann, the Business Development Coordinator faculty member, states, "It is a vital resource for advertising and PR agencies and brands seeking marketing expertise of creative young millennial minds." The Agency places a large emphasis on the fact that they are not (Haley, Ritsch and Smith) a student-run agency, but a student-staffed agency.

The students are managed by the professional expertise of a suite of 6 professionals. The Agency offers advertising, PR, social media, creative, digital, and research services. Their branding follows a theme of simplicity—they are simply called “The Agency,” and they have “The Team,” “The Professionals,” and even an office pet called “The Fish.” They spread the word about their services through their affiliation with the university and the alumni in Gator Nation, their interpersonal networks of professionals, and trips both with and without students to share their work (Kaufmann).

The workflow at The Agency follows 6 pillars: 6 pillars:

1. Strategy, who manage an online research resource called MAVY
2. Creative, led by the creative director
3. Development, staffed by coders
4. Connectors, media specialists

5. Catalysts, account services
6. Administration, who manage the internal work flow

Clients talk to Kelli Kaufmann first to develop a proposal and contract and are assisted by each pillar as necessary (Kaufmann).

The workflow is executed by a team of devoted students. Students are incentivized to participate by the immersive, hands-on learning experience with professional guidance—this is the only place on the campus that offers that atmosphere. There is the option to get school credit, and web developers are incentivized to join by the option of free courses through a local development school, Gainesville Dev Academy. "Student Team members work in a structured, immersive learning environment on important client assignments, mentored by seasoned professionals (Kaufmann)."

The Agency has successfully executed work for clients McDonald's, P&G, and Best Buy (The Agency). They assisted in the opening of an Audi dealership for Warren Henry Automotive Group. They did a campaign promoting Mexico's ecotourism destination, Experiencias Xcaret, to travel and tourism journalists through earned and shared media campaigns. They succeeded in conducting a nationwide campus campaign to help the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants reposition accounting as an exciting and fulfilling career. They built websites for the Southern Sudan Healthcare Organization, UF College of Medicine, UF International Center, MAVY and UF Alumni Association. They also promoted the Southern Sudan Healthcare Organization through various channels and developing a business plan to attract donor support (Kaufmann).

Students at The Agency are paid similarly to any professional agency and clients are willing to pay those fees. Clients have very high expectations, so students work even

when classes aren't in session and they are held to the same standard as a professional agency. "There was definitely a learning curve in the beginning. Some of the clients that we had early on were very patient as we learned The Agency as a structure: what works and what doesn't... we are still very much learning as we go through trial and error" (Kaufmann). The Agency continues to evolve as it grows and refines its processes.

The Agency also stands out among student-staffed agencies due to their development of MAVY, as research tool incorporating a community of more than 2,000 people ages 18-35 who take BuzzFeed-style quizzes and participate in discussion forums and mobile missions. This allows The Agency to monitor attitudes and set benchmarks of campaign success before showing work to a client (Kaufmann) (The Agency). This is a unique tool that is a rare and well-developed resource for a student agency.

The vast benefits of participating in The Agency are evident in student outcomes. The program has many applicants and limited space, so top students are admitted. After the first year, The Agency established "The 100 Project," which aimed to place 100 percent of graduates in prestigious jobs—the first year had an 80 percent success rate without effort. They created a website called "The Talent" to showcase students to HR in companies and started taking field trips to New York City, Orlando, and other cities. Measuring 6 months after graduation, the program is only three students away from meeting that goal in comparison to the 40 percent placement rate of the college overall (Kaufmann).

The Agency is a Type 1 agency due to high faculty involvement, rigid structure and protocol, competitive applications, and the ability to bill clients. It runs a low risk of dissolving (Bush, Student Public Relations Agencies: A Qualitative Study of the

Pedagogical Benefits, Risks, and a Framework for Success). This agency demonstrates optimal characteristics that other student operations strive to develop and implement, which gives it a competitive advantage and increases its credibility among clients.

PR LAB

PR Lab at Boston University was founded in 1978 and is quite possibly the oldest student agency. PR Lab is modeled after a professional modern agency with a President of Client Services and a President of Operations who are both supported by 3-5 directors who are responsible for client relations and the supervisors below them. Supervisors lead teams of account executives on every project. Amy Shanler has been the faculty member in charge of the program since 2013, when she established a manual to solidify their operating procedures (PR Lab).

The agency has 85 members and offers the following services: a scope of work (agreed upon list of deliverables) to start and solve business challenges, recruiting, donating, awareness/online engagement, media relations, social media, design work, event management, increasingly video production, SEO, paid social placements, and content marketing (blogs and brochures). They primarily raise awareness about their services on social media, through word of mouth, and through earned media placements such as PR Week. There are also campus press and awards that add credibility of a professional caliber to the organization, which often beats out professional agencies (Shanler).

The creative process begins with a scope of work, then teams are established and a plan of action is created. Each week an activity report is delivered to every client on

Friday at 5pm demonstrating the work that has been done and what the next steps are. There is also a midpoint review and a semester wrap-up, which are more formal client presentations. "It's very streamlined. We're very fast. We provide a large volume of content in a really concentrated period of time (Shanler)."

The students involved are mostly PR majors, and there are pre-requisites to join that include three writing classes and a foundation principles class taught by Amy Shanler. This ensures that PR Lab employs qualified students. School credit is available for participating (Shanler). Students are enthusiastic to join PR Lab whether they need the credit or not.

There is also a significant amount of professional influence. There are professional creative and research directors on staff, and there are three guest speakers each semester. One of these is a writing professor to review key writing principles, one is an outside client speaker to discuss client needs and perspectives, and one is a PR professional who outlines "A Day in the Life of a PR Agency Professional," including challenges and duties of the career. Career Services is also highly involved and helps students prepare portfolios, which are required (Shanler).

Clients are a mix of nonprofit and commercial entities and BU affiliates such as the Boston University Police Department, which requires work like a public safety awareness campaigns. A new client is called Hello Internet, a domain company which is launching the ".boston" domain. There are also exterior nonprofits such as Art and Giving, which sells art and splits the proceeds between the artist and cancer research. There is a \$250/client fee every semester, which includes account teams of 2-3 account

executives, one account supervisor, one account director, campaign branding, brand awareness strategies, media relations, and more (Shanler).

Some optimal methods and best practices Shanler has learned include forecasting your clients to meet the staffing and building client rosters around the number of students participating. She also finds importance in onboarding the clients and internal communication. The clients have very high expectations that match professional agencies. To meet these, students receive training in communication, project management, and strictly enforced deadlines. Client expectations are met and they are pleased with fresh, diverse thinking and willing to give feedback. Client retention is 95 percent and if PR Lab charged the same rates as a commercial agency, it would bring in over \$2 million annual revenue (Shanler).

Students who are involved have PR Lab's reputation on their resume, which is extremely beneficial due to the credibility the institution has. This has led to numerous student success stories over the years. Recently, students have been hired by clients they work on and other prestigious companies. The following students voiced their opinions about the benefits of a student agency like PR Lab: "Having PR Lab on my resume definitely gave me more opportunities when looking for jobs!" - Phoebe Gittelsohn, media coordinator for CBS; "PR Lab was the best agency experience I had before Fleishman-Hillard. The tasks and tools we have learned to use put me so much ahead of the curve during my current internship." -Victoria Kwan, leadership development program, Fleishman-Hillard; "I am so grateful to PR Lab - it definitely provided me with useful experience and a leg up on my competition when it came to finding a job." -Erica Morelli, account coordinator, Exposure (Shanler).

PR Lab is also a Type 1 agency with a low risk of dissolving due to high faculty involvement, rigid structure and protocol, competitive applications, and the ability to bill clients (Bush, Student Public Relations Agencies: A Qualitative Study of the Pedagogical Benefits, Risks, and a Framework for Success). The longevity of PR Lab's operations has allowed it to streamline and optimize its processes to meet client needs and generate a valuable experience for students. Many other student agencies endeavor to emulate PR Lab's characteristics and success.

ADLAB

Brigham Young University's Adlab began in 2003 and has about 100 applicants every semester, only half of whom are accepted. There is an account management track and then the opportunity to apply for the creative track. Every project has art direction, copywriting, content creators, project managers, and creative directors assigned to it. The services vary by project but include consulting, copywriting, video creation, strategy, and research (Adlab). These services are executed by students and staff familiar with effective advertising.

The faculty of Adlab is comprised of 6 professionals—they give advice and procure clients, but Adlab is considered to be student-run and rely on project managers and creative directors to manage projects. Students must have taken pre-requisite classes and must fill out a creative application to apply, which includes a video. All of the students work on a volunteer basis except the top 4 management positions (Call).

In terms of financial practice, Adlab does charge clients for work. Agency outcomes are very positive considering the clients often don't have any expectations

(Call). Clients include the Food and Care Coalition and a campaign to raise money for the homeless, Nike ID, Adobe CC Spark, Neff Headwear, Ad Council, Doritos Guardian, Mini Cooper, and Holiday Inn (Adlab).

The students involved reap the benefit of Adlab's reputation with recruiters. Adlab does a recruiting fair for graduating seniors that agencies are invited to, including top-performing agencies in the country. Students can demonstrate their personal websites and portfolios, and some are hired because of the fair every year (Call). This fair is an investment by the agency into the future of its students, and it pays off in the form of esteemed alumni in desirable industry positions.

Candace Call graduated from Adlab last December. She had previously gained a summer internship because of her experience in Adlab and received a full-time offer from this agency and others, but she accepted an offer from Vivint Smart Home as a Jr. Digital Content Strategist in the Digital Marketing Department instead. "The career that I have right now—I owe it all to the Adlab. Just the experience I've gained, the mentorship I was able to get, and the opportunities I've been given have made me super grateful. Not just work experience—I've gained a lot of confidence in general emotionally going into the real world (Call)."

Similar to The Agency and PR Lab, BYU Adlab is a Type 1 agency (Bush, Student Public Relations Agencies: A Qualitative Study of the Pedagogical Benefits, Risks, and a Framework for Success). Adlab has a well-regarded reputation within the advertising community and among employers that is highly valuable to students involved and Brigham Young University.

RESULTS

Both the literature research and interview data support my hypothesis that student agencies as experiential programs are highly beneficial to student involved in a professional capacity is correct. The immersive, hands-on skillsets developed within these agencies enables students to be fully prepared for the professional industry when they graduate. Learning the application of concepts taught in classrooms bridges the gap between information and outcomes. These working skills are appealing to employers, who will not need to invest as much time or as many resources into training their new employee.

Students differentiate themselves initially because of the value of agencies on their resumes and in interviews, and they perform optimally once they enter the workforce. They have developed and honed proper skills such as communication, deadline management, team collaboration, and other technical skills that cannot be taught in a classroom. Employers recognize this and are much more likely to hire a student involved in these activities. Student agencies are a combination of marketing, advertising, and public relations. They endow participants with the necessary abilities to succeed in a variety of careers within various industries upon graduation.

Faculty involvement is integral to the success, stability, and efficacy of these student agencies. This professional influence is an example for students and becomes an avenue for success. The students involved are ambitious yet diverse—they are willing to devote their time and talent to learn how to properly deliver professional-quality work to the clients. This factor was unanimous across studies and different types of agencies.

Although agencies vary widely in size and structure, they usually have similar components that echo the structure of professional agencies, focusing on both the account management and the creative sides of the operation. Some agencies' methods are more successful than others', and patterns in structure and involvement typify these varying levels of success. Agencies will typically offer the same products and services, which are a combination of marketing, advertising, and PR offerings. Financial processes for these offerings differ and can range from the price of a professional agency to pro-bono. Agencies take different approaches to self-branding and raising awareness to gain clients.

The clients are a large variety of businesses, nonprofits, and organizational branches of all sizes. Agencies will follow an internal process to meet client demands and execute work for them.

The students involved develop the ability to work with clients and increased marketability. They practice working in a team, take on responsibility, solve problems, gain leadership experience, and improve their professional confidence. Additionally, the qualitative information attained by comparing five different student agencies showed a pattern in content that affirmed these benefits regardless of variations in the agencies. Current students, graduated students, and faculty alike affirmed the value of such institutions and the competitive advantage they provide for students involved.

Student agencies are a valuable asset for colleges and universities, particularly for marketing, advertising, communications, and public relations department. Students should consider joining these organizations to gain the experience necessary for them to get an ideal job when graduating. The value of time and effort invested into these programs will be vastly advantageous upon graduation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As I analyzed a variety of student agencies of varying success levels, I evaluated my findings in comparison to my experience at the University of Utah's AdThing. My juxtaposition demonstrated that AdThing, though strong, has several areas in which its standing can be improved and modeled after successful agencies of longer standing. These include increasing the accountability of students involved, establishing more professional internal processes, and creating an employer outreach program in order to fully attain Type 1 status as an agency.

AdThing currently at a critical point in its second year of operations. The students who were primarily involved in the agency's initial establishment are about to graduate, and agency leadership is in the process of transitioning to a younger generation of students. In order to solidify the agency's operational standing, it is necessary for AdThing to improve its processes and become a Type 1 agency in order to prevent its dissolution as leadership transitions to new hands.

The initial and most easily-implemented improvement is to hold students more accountable within their positions in AdThing. Currently, there is a moderate level of accountability within the agency. Students are expected to attend any internal meeting mandated by the head of their department (creative, accounts, or strategy) as well as relevant client meetings. There is an established workflow, but it is only seldom adhered to exactly. There are no prerequisite courses or other class requirements to join. Accountability is integral to student commitment and prioritization, and it would be relatively simple to make some accountability improvements.

To improve student accountability, AdThing must require students to attend at least one departmental meeting and any necessary client meetings rather than expect them to. AdThing should hold bi-monthly all-staff meetings to make sure that everyone is aware of the status of projects that are ongoing. It is critical that students spend time in the AdThing office in order to accomplish projects as a team. AdThing has the ability to offer credit for involvement, and in order for students to receive credit AdThing must require that they spend at least three hours in the office each week including meetings--one hour for each credit, just like other three-credit classes at the University of Utah. When hiring new students, AdThing must establish a competitive application which evaluates writing skills and creative ability, such as a short sample essay or spec work for a potential client in addition to an in-person interview with at least two members of the leadership team. This application process would be similar to that of a professional agency. Each of these implementations would heighten student accountability to improve internal performance.

The next improvement that AdThing must focus on involves refining internal processes to a more professional level. Currently, AdThing's work is advertised primarily through word of mouth and campus reputation, which limits the amount of potential clients exposed to AdThing. AdThing's billing process is inefficient and arbitrary, varying according to client. The agency focuses more on execution than research and analytics. Client updates are inconsistent and again depend on the client. Unlike other agencies, there are no systems in place to improve students' skillsets while they work for the agency. Each of these areas within AdThing have the potential to be improved to raise the caliber of the agency.

AdThing is capable of creative, exceptional work and it requires a better method of attracting viable clients. AdThing should initiate public awareness campaigns to educate potential clients in Salt Lake City about the services that it provides, thus enabling us to attract more clients and be more selective in the clients it works with. This would also improve our reputation by association with prestigious clients. AdThing must standardize its billing procedure by creating set prices for different services, and implement that procedure with all clients equally. AdThing should increase its focus on research and analytics by bringing on team members who specialize in those areas. Then, similarly to The Agency, AdThing would be capable of executing viable research to predict how consumer bases will react to marketing. This added value would attract a more esteemed client base. Within the agency, the team must provide weekly reports to each client at the same time each week to ensure consistent and predictable updates. Each team should also do a mid-semester update with leadership and the client, as well as a presentation of work executed at the end of each semester in order to benchmark progress similarly to PR Lab. It would be extremely valuable for AdThing to bring in guest speakers just as other agencies do to improve student skillsets. These could include a professor promoting writing skills or industry professionals who give the students an idea of what their career will look like after graduation. Improving these internal processes would be beneficial to the agency's reputation and the students involved, solidifying AdThing into a Type 1 agency.

Finally, I recommend that AdThing create an employer outreach program, a focus that has been valuable for other student agencies such as Adlab and The Agency. There is no specific employer focus within AdThing beyond Professor Oakley, the director,

recommending students for jobs. By creating a program that trains the AdThing students on how to polish a portfolio or website and sourcing those portfolios out to employers, it will assist students in getting jobs they desire and promoting the program as an AdThing alumni. Additionally, such a program would increase awareness of the program both locally and nationally.

By increasing the accountability standard required of students, refining and polishing internal processes to reach a more professional caliber, and designing an employer outreach program, AdThing would fully achieve Type 1 agency status and be guaranteed longevity and viability at the University of Utah in the future. This will allow future generations to benefit from this student agency just as I have throughout my education.

CONCLUSION

The marketing research process began with a question: “Do student agencies successfully prepare students involved to be more valuable in the workplace after graduation?” Investigating and probing this question required breaking down the components of a student agency. This exploratory study was designed to both examine currently available literature and to conduct interviews to collect primary data as well. Examining each factor of the agencies demonstrated common procedures and best practices that led to successful firms. Students, faculty, and professionals interviewed offered insights about specific firms and personal experiences of the benefits associated with them.

The research overwhelmingly indicates that student agencies adequately prepare students for the professional workplace and often lead to career opportunities. Students who take advantage of these agencies on campus as an opportunity will have a competitive advantage over their peers in being hired and performing successfully in their chosen industries. The abilities developed in student agencies allow students to garner relevant career experience prior to graduation that allows them to maximize their academic experience and leads to professional success.

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EXHIBITS

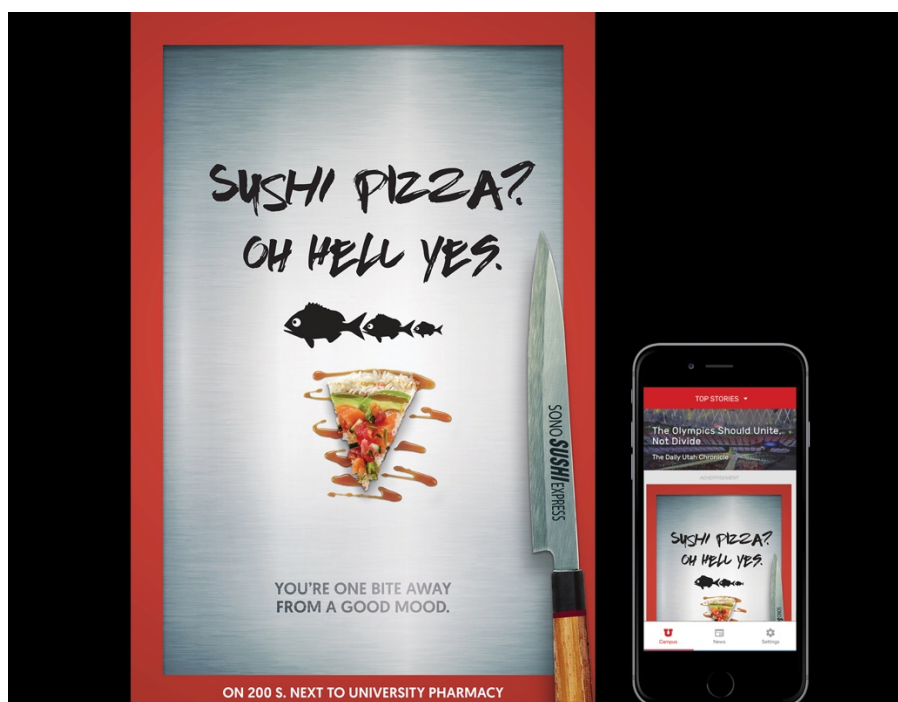
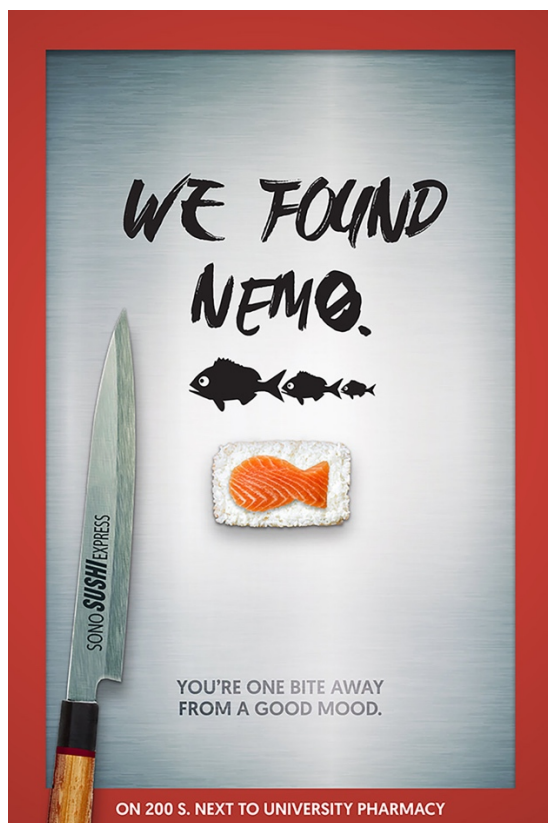
Table 1: 2016 student survey measuring agency experiences (Haley, Ritsch and Smith).

<i>Item</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i> <i>n = 209</i>
It is important for my college or university to have a student agency for advertising/public relations.	4.67 (.67)
It is/was important for my learning to work directly with real clients.	4.59 (.67)
The experience has enhanced my marketability as a job candidate.	4.46 (.80)
I feel better prepared for the professional expectations of the workplace.	4.38 (.79)
The experience allowed me to learn at a deeper level the concepts covered in previous course-work.	4.38 (.83)
Being in a responsible, dedicated job role is/was one of the most valuable things about the experience.	4.30 (.79)
I feel more confident in my abilities.	4.27 (.79)
A student agency should be selective; students should have to apply before being admitted.	4.25 (1.05)
I have gained a greater sensitivity for people who are different from me.	3.83 (1.07)
Experience item average	4.35 ($\alpha = .80$)

Table 2: 2016 student survey results evaluating the effect that agency work had on ten types of skills (Haley, Ritsch and Smith).

<i>My experience in the student agency has enhanced my skills in the following areas:</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i> <i>n=203</i>
Working within a team structure	4.37 (.72)
Interpersonal skills	4.29 (.72)
Problem-solving	4.20 (.83)
Leadership	4.24 (.85)
Writing	3.66 (.94)
Working with clients	4.45 (.76)
Understanding new media	3.87 (.96)
Strategic planning	4.25 (.79)
Production skills	3.34 (1.08)
Business practices	3.90 (1.05)

Exhibit 1: AdThing client work examples (AdThing).



Sono Sushi



Freebirds World Burritos



University of Utah Health Plans



David Eccles School of Business

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