Building an Export-promoting Internship Program
Effective Partnerships for quick results

Mel Jameson
Lee Business School, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Recent rapid changes in the International Business internships at Lee Business School, UNLV
Motivation for presenting

- **Sharing**: What’s been so beneficial for us, may be useful for others.
- **Reflecting**: An opportunity to consider what are the best and most essential features.
- **Comparing**: Hopefully to learn about similar circumstances and responses elsewhere.
Basic Structure

- UNLV IB Program provides interns
- Business assistance agencies (Nevada SBDC, MEP) use the interns
  - to “sell” SMEs on the value of exporting, and
  - to assist them to develop export plans.
Context: Why this felt like a breakthrough

- UNLV IB Major was established in the late 90s; director appointed about 2000.

  Program has tried to find its way forward with limited resources

- We have tried to emphasize internships throughout
  - more struggle than success
  - perpetual mismatch
And then things came together

- It seemed to happen suddenly two or three years ago.
- What are the lessons?
Some key elements

- Business development agency – sufficiently large business clientele
- IB Program – sufficiently large number of students
  
  To maintain a dependable flow of matches

- Interest in export by all

  To fit into the IB program

NASBITE 2012; Portland OR
How were these achieved?

Evolution of the program

1. Spring 2010 – first Nevada ExporTech™ run by NIE
2. July 2010 – BIE grant period begins
3. First cohort of NSBDC interns
4. Spring 2011 – second ExporTech™
5. Fall 2011 – second cohort of NSBDC interns
6. Spring 2012 – third cohort of NSBDC interns also serves third ExporTech™
First ExporTech™ Spring 2010

• Terry Culp, Director of Nevada Industry Excellence (NIE) the Nevada MEP provider
  • decides to offer ExporTec h™
  • Requests interns from UNLV IB
First ExporTech™ Spring 2010

The ExporTec h™ program:

- Developed by the Commercial Service and MEP
- Companies, ready for export or ready to expand export, attend three all-day sessions at one month intervals
- Hear experts’ presentations on export
- Develop an export plan
- Receive feedback and suggestions on plan from experts
- Plan ready for implementation following final session
Role of interns

- Attend all sessions
- Provide research and other support necessary to prepare export plans.
First ExporTech™ Spring 2010

- Provision of key elements:
- Business clientele – clients of NIE
- Export interest – inherent in decision to offer program
- Student clientele – created certain challenges
  - Relatively short notice
  - No pay available
    - Firms barely convinced to look into export
    - Neither NEI nor UNLV IB had budget to pay interns
  - Time too short to allow academic credit for internship
BIE grant begins: fall 2010

- Provides funds for payment of interns
- NSBDC is agreement partner
First NSBDC cohort

- Student clientele
  - Grant funded (limited) compensation for students
  - Internship period coordinated with the semester to permit academic credit
- Business clientele available to NSBDC
- Export interest of clients often a challenge

First cohort collected and prepared for presentation export education material
Second ExportTech™ Spring 2011

- Business clientele – clients of NIE
- Export interest – inherent in decision to offer program
- Student clientele – created certain challenges
  - BIE grant funded pay and advance notice helped recruiting
  - However time remained too short to allow academic credit

NASBITE 2012; Portland OR
Second NSBDC cohort

- Business and student clienteles remain available
- Program now began to address the export interest issue
  - Students now present material developed by the first cohort to business clients recommended by NSBDC advisors to stimulate interest in export.
  - When interest results, interns assist in developing an export plan, working with client and NSBDC advisors.
Most recent cohort: Spring 2012

- The same interns working with the NSBDC are detailed to ExporTech for the two months it is in session. Total time in the internship now sufficient for academic credit.
- Otherwise same arrangements as previously
Summary: Providing key elements

- Business clientele – partnering with a business development agency (e.g. SBDC) immediately brings in their clients.

- Student clientele
  - Available to the program in principle
  - Communication can be a problem
Summary: Providing key elements

• Export interest may be an issue
  • ExporTech program automatically focused.
  • Presumably could connect with other export training programs as well
  • One could also develop one’s own material (NSBDC)
Summary: Providing key elements

- I believe that its provision of these three elements explains why the program succeeded.
- Working with a business development agency that has a well-established list of clients explains why it succeeded so quickly.
Direct benefits to IB program

- Usual benefits to interns
  - Experience gained by interns
  - Connections and occasional placement
- Increasing awareness of the program
  - Becoming more part of the culture
  - Recruiting interns becoming easier
Direct benefits to companies

- **ExporTech™ Companies**
  - Program as a whole very successful in leading to export plans, implementation, and sales results
  - Many partners contribute
  - Interns have proved invaluable for creating export plans
    - Much easier for companies; More detailed
    - Participants have been very complementary

- **NSBDC Companies**
  - Increased export awareness
  - Export planning
Direct benefits to partners

- Evaluated by success of clients noted above
Ancillary benefits

- The internship program also raised the profile of the IB program generally
  - General awareness of program
  - A visible success inspires belief more is possible
- Indirect but tangible benefit, fund raising and support
  - Executive Advisory Board has become more active and more successful at collecting contributions to the program.
  - We are trying to leverage this to increase numbers of direct provided internship placements
Lessons: initiating a program

- Partnering with a business development agency can lead to very fast growth of the program.
- Export interest might be an issue – If a pre-existing export training program is not used, one needs to be developed.
• Lessons: generalizability

• If the three key elements are provided, it would seem possible to implement a program.

• Question – How similar is Las Vegas to the situation elsewhere?
  • SBDCs are widespread
  • There is at least one MEP provider in every state.