



**GLOBAL WELLNESS  
INSTITUTE™**



Global Internship  
Program

*Excellence through Example*

# **SURVEY REPORT**

Experiential Learning Programs  
Spa & Wellness Establishments

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## Executive Summary

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Spa and wellness establishments across the globe were asked to participate in a survey to assess the current state of experiential learning programs and how they are being used within a broad spectrum of spa and wellness companies. Those currently hosting programs were asked about the format of their programs, the type of participants they have within their experiential learning (EL) programs, methods of compensation offered, how successful they feel the programs are for their company, and more. Those not currently hosting an EL program were asked what has deterred them from starting one, when they may be creating a program, and what changed their mind.

A total of 127 responses were received, of which a majority (64%) was answered by professionals within resort and hotel environments, with the second largest groups being day spas and fitness or membership club professionals.

Thirty nine percent of the survey respondents are currently offering some kind of EL program. The two most popular categories of experiential learning programs are internships and manager-in-training (MIT) programs. Job shadowing is the third most popular type of EL program.

Most noted responses to what has kept establishments from implementing an experiential learning program were 'not a priority or part of strategy' and 'organizational complexity.' The survey showed that additional reasons for not hosting an EL program were 'cost' and they 'didn't see value'. Committee members found it interesting that 12% of respondents placed 'not knowing how to find students' as one of the main reasons for not running an EL program. This indicated to the Global Internship Program Committee that the resources currently under development within this educational initiative; specifically, an Internship Portal where interns can unite with internships, should prove to answer this common challenge with EL programs.

Ninety percent of respondents believe that experiential learning programs are beneficial to their business establishment and 97% of respondents felt very strongly that EL programs have a positive impact on a student's success post-graduation. Once a student has successfully completed the EL program, full time employment is an opportunity noted by 80% of the establishments surveyed. This is in strong support of the fact that establishments ranked 'recruitment' and 'fresh insight' as the two most important reasons for hosting an EL program, important considerations for both future students and spa and wellness establishments.

## Introduction

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The spa industry is facing global workforce and education challenges due to increasing consumer demand. According to the 2014 *Global Spa & Wellness Economy Monitor*, the spa industry will need 2.7 million employees by 2018. An internship initiative was inspired by the ever-increasing worldwide need for spa management talent to have both the educational skills and the practical experience in order to be effective leaders.

With the goal of solving the very real industry challenge of attracting, supporting and educating people to the spa industry, it is the goal of the Global Internship Program Committee (GIPC) to be a central contributor in answering to the needs of four primary groups: (1) **Spa and Wellness Management Education Programs** who need this component to enrich their core curriculum offerings, (2) **Spa and Wellness Management Students** who need the hands on experience to enhance their marketability and competitive advantage (3) **Potential Spa and Wellness Management Employers** who are looking for qualified candidates who can be developed efficiently to handle the ever increasing complexities of a Spa and Wellness Management career and (4) **Spa and Wellness Industry Professionals** looking for an opportunity to further their careers in the Spa and Wellness Management market.

This report has been developed to provide an overview of one of the tools utilized by the GIPC; a descriptive survey of business establishments offering spa management experiential learning programs. This survey is intended to help us better understand how these business establishments use and benefit from EL programs -- including Internships, Externships, Manager-in-Training, and Shadowing programs.

## Methodology

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A survey was developed by the Global Internship Program Committee (GIPC) to create resources for members of and those interested in the spa and wellness industry. The survey focused on the current state of existing experiential learning programs with a (primarily) spa management focus.

Using targeted emails sent by the GIPC, the Global Wellness Institute, Spas2b Inc., and the Spa Industry Association of Canada (SIAC), the survey was sent to over 1,000 global spa and wellness establishments that potentially offered spa and wellness EL programs. Links to the online survey were also posted on social media platforms. Spa Directors or Managers who have direct oversight of EL programs or those who would have direct oversight of a potential program were asked to complete the survey.

Questionnaire topics included:

- Demographics
- Existence of Experiential Learning Program(s)
- Details of the Experiential Learning Program(s)
- Candidate Selection
- Program Compensation
- Perceived Value of Experiential Learning Program(s)
- Aspects discouraging Experiential Learning Programs
- Potential Experiential Learning Programs

Using the SurveyMonkey platform, the committee reviewed the collected responses, removing any unusable data. Results were analyzed using Excel. Response data in this report is for all responses received as of December 4, 2015. The online survey will remain open to allow for additional data to be used in the creation of future publications. It is important to note that the reported results include only a sampling of spa management establishments currently hosting EL opportunities and can therefore not be generalized to represent the entire population.

## Survey Results

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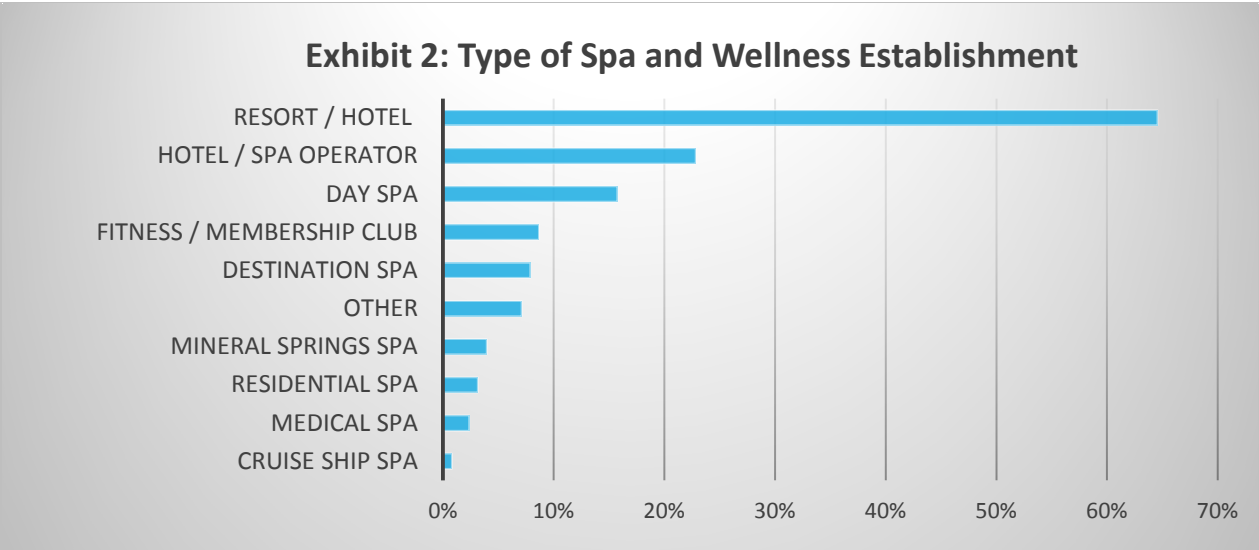
A total of 135 responses were received, of which 127 were usable. Of the usable surveys collected from 39 countries, 25% were from the United States, 17% from Canada and the remainder (each with three or more responses) were from such countries as: China, India, Macau, Singapore, Sweden, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, and United Kingdom. The total number of respondents currently offering EL opportunities was 50 (39% of sample).

### ***Demographics***

Survey Respondents were asked to identify what type of spa and wellness environment, either Corporate Office or Individual Establishment, in which they offer or would offer an experiential learning program. An overwhelming majority of 88% answered for a spa and wellness establishment (Exhibit 1). Of those responses, 64% was answered by professionals in resort/hotel environments, followed by 23% hotel/spa operators and 15% day spas (Exhibit 2).

**Exhibit 1: Type of Environment for Experiential Learning**



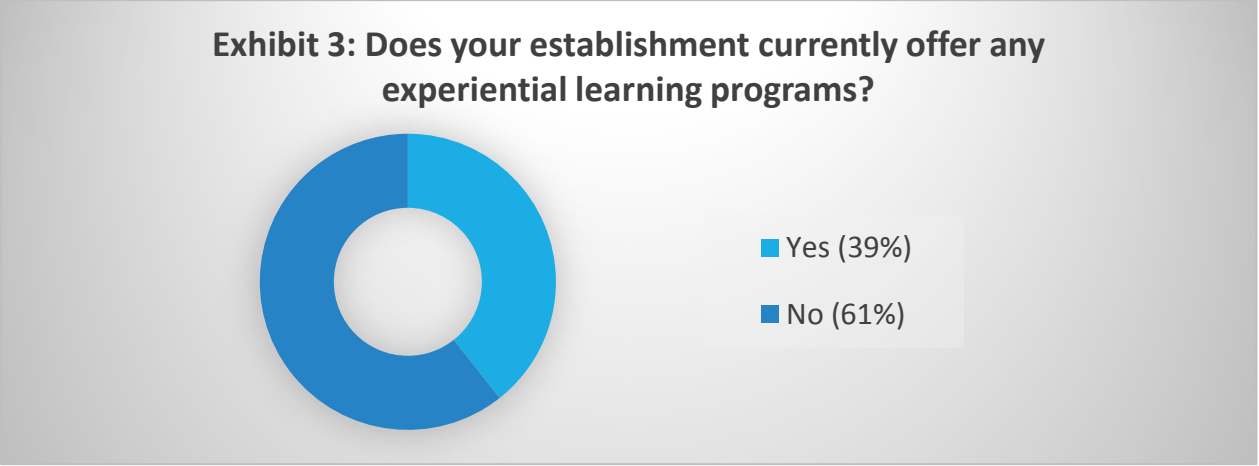


**Other responses included:**

Wellness Center, Wellness and Slimming Salon, Consultancy, Online Spa Publication.

**Existence of Experiential Learning Programs**

When asked about the existence of experiential learning programs (ELPs), 39% of the establishments surveyed answered that they are currently offering some kind of ELP (Exhibit 3).



**Details of the Experiential Learning Programs**

The majority of respondents who already have ELPs have been running them anywhere from 2 to over 11 years, with only 23% of respondents having had their ELP established for under 1 year (Exhibit 4). The majority of ELPs (36%) host 2 to 4 participants within a year, with some programs (23%) hosting over 11 participants annually (Exhibit 5).

Spa and wellness establishments noted having one (51%) or two (23%) locations offering ELPs (Exhibit 6). Of those locations, 72% specifically target spa and wellness career minded students to participate in their ELP (Exhibit 7).

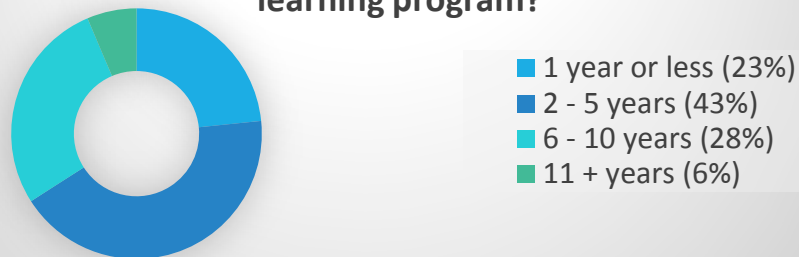
The most common type of ELP being offered is an 'internship' with 70% of responses and 'manager-in-training' coming in next at 54% (Exhibit 8). 29 Establishments indicated that they offer more than one type of ELP within their location. Programs were described mainly as having 'highly structured' (49%) and 'loosely structured' (43%) curriculum (Exhibit 9).

The top 3 operational areas that students are exposed to are; spa (93%), retail (70%) and wellness centers (64%) and fitness centers (60%). Perhaps not surprisingly, 'medical' was the work area with the least amount of exposure for participants, at only 4% (Exhibit 10).

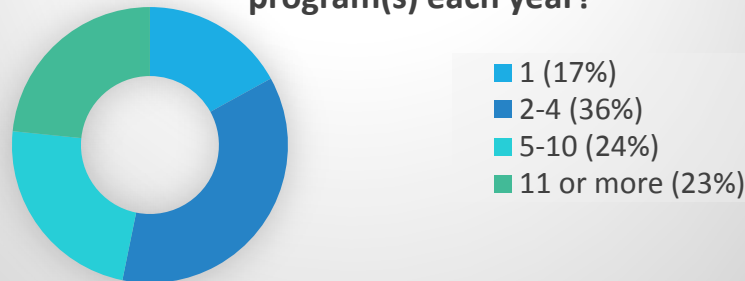
Judging by the survey responses, it appears that the most common length of an ELP extends over a period of several months (64%). Year long and one-day to one-week long programs are least common, ranked at approximately 19% each (Exhibit 11). An EL student's weekly time commitment varies and is closely divided between part time commitment (45%) at 1-29 hours per week and full time engagement (55%) at 30+ hours weekly (Exhibit 12).

Establishments reported 51% of their EL students 'never' leave prior to completion of the program, while 43% of students leave 'occasionally' and 6% leave 'frequently'. Although there may be a number of reasons for these statistics, both personal and professional, this data may cause concern in some establishments and deserves closer examination (Exhibit 13).

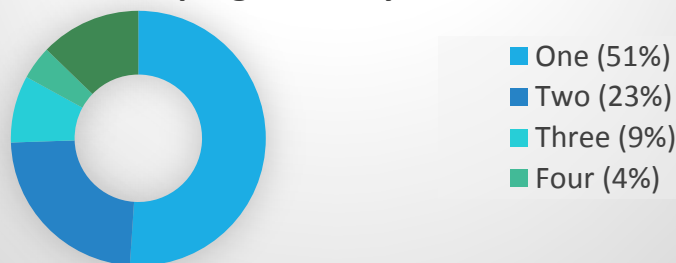
**Exhibit 4: How long have you been running an experiential learning program?**



**Exhibit 5: How many participants are typically included in your program(s) each year?**



**Exhibit 6: How many establishments with experiential learning programs do you oversee?**



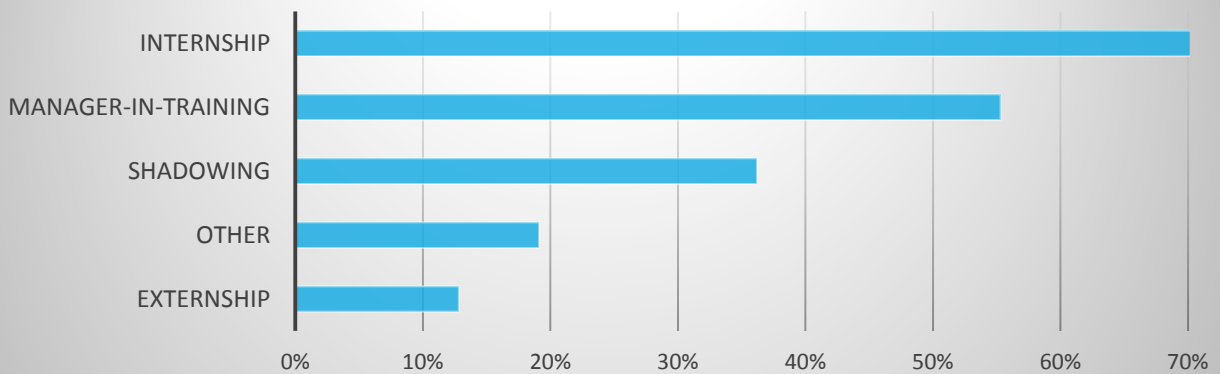
**Other responses included:**

Several responses indicating 7-10 programs and one with over 30; "Depends on the year, sometimes 4 or 8"; and "We have 140 spas in 55 countries and our partnership introduces students to our portfolio in the hope of making successful placements."

### Exhibit 7: Is your experiential learning program targeted to spa and wellness career minded students?



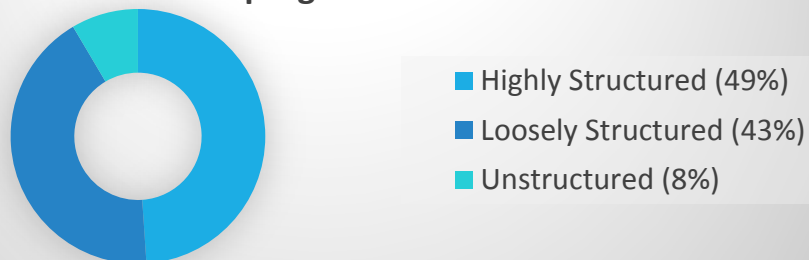
### Exhibit 8: Type of experiential learning program(s) offered:



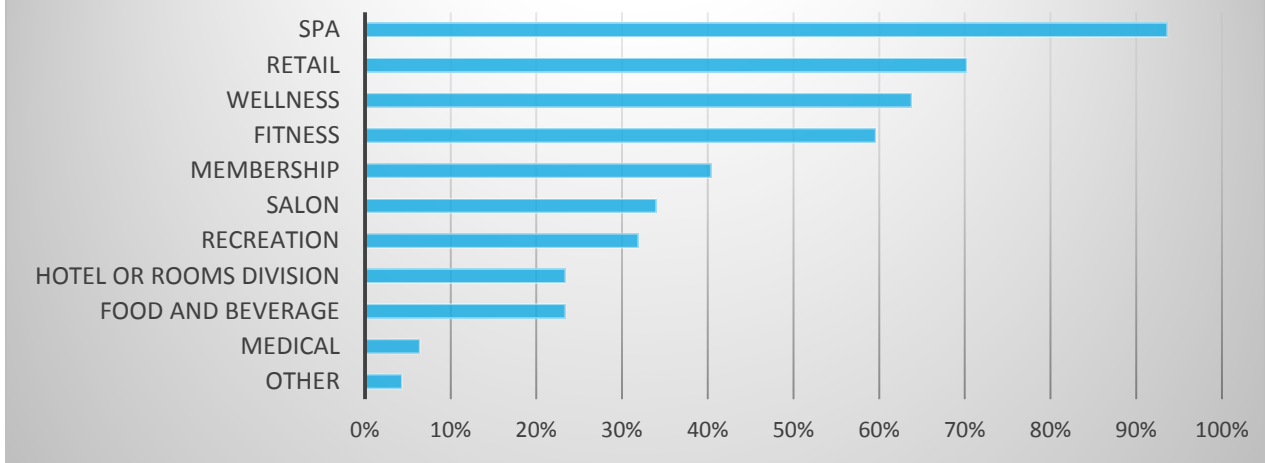
#### Other responses included:

In addition to offering a type of EL Program listed above, establishments listed these 'other' programs: Online Education; Starwood Associate Development Program; Fast-Track programs; ESPA UK Training Academy visit and online training modules; Online Spa Management Courses; Structured trainings in Ayurveda and bodywork modalities; Training program called Red Lane Institute where students train to become massage therapists and gain CEU credit.

### Exhibit 9: How structured is your experiential learning program?



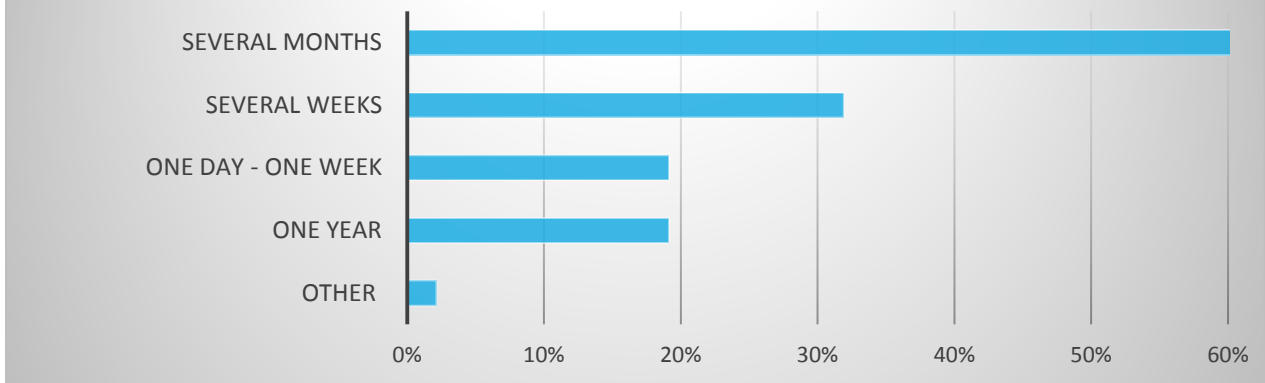
**Exhibit 10: Work areas participants are exposed to:**



**Other responses:**

Spa Consultancy, Pre-Opening Services, Financial & Budgeting, All corporate disciplines.

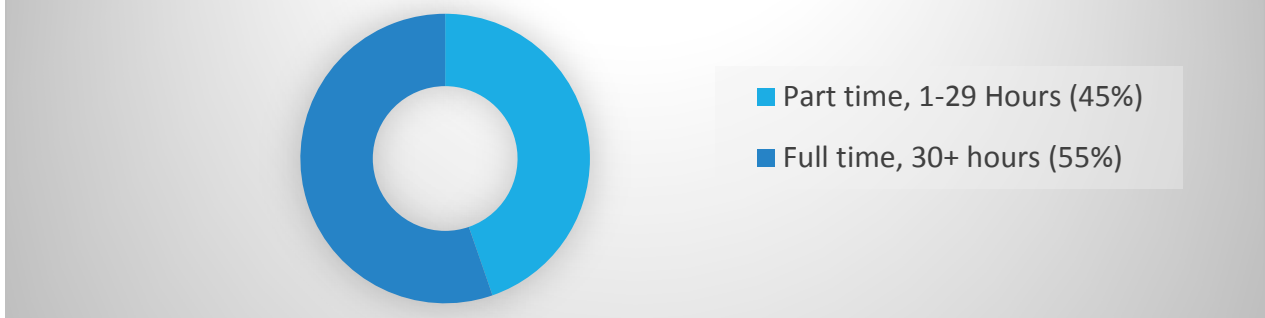
**Exhibit 11: Length of experiential learning program(s):**



**Other responses:**

Depends on the type of professional in training; 6 or 4 months, depending on school structure

**Exhibit 12: What is the participants's weekly time commitment?**





### Exhibit 13: How often do students leave prior to completing your establishment's experiential learning program(s)?



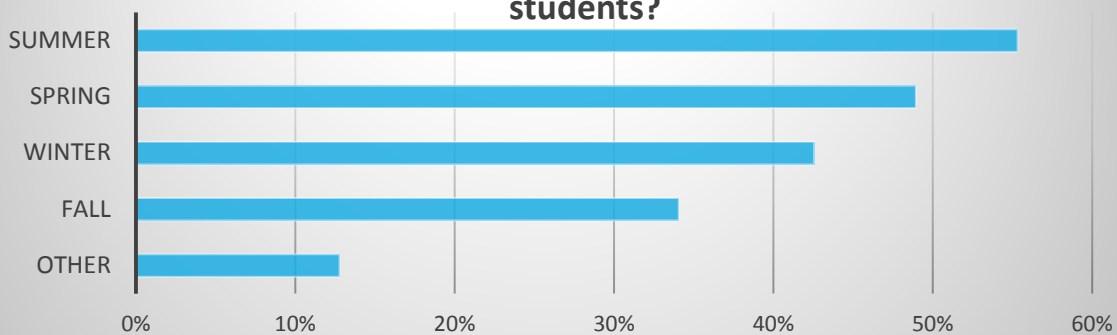
### Candidate Selection

55% of respondents search for spa and wellness experiential learning candidates in summer and just slightly less in spring (49%) compared to other seasons (Exhibit 14). This corresponds with generally well-known increases in business activity during those two seasons, as well as data from the previous section, indicating the most common length of ELP extends over several months (Exhibit 11). 60% of respondents find it 'somewhat difficult' to find and secure ELP candidates, with 27% finding it 'easy' and 13% finding it 'difficult' (Exhibit 15).

Establishments target student candidates seeking a 'certificate' (49%) or 'diploma' (44%) followed by a 'bachelor's degree' (40%)(Exhibit 16). 'Professionalism' (78%) and interest in spa and wellness as an 'area of study' (56%) are the two most important factors when choosing candidates for their EL programs. 'Job experience', 'recommendations' and 'educational institution' are also significant contributors (47%, 38%, 37% respectively) to the decision-making process (Exhibit 17).

Based on the survey responses, 78% of establishments said that 'communication' is the single most important skill needed for a student to be accepted into their ELP. 'Guest relations' (71%) and knowing the 'spa treatments and modalities' (60%) are also highly coveted skill-sets. Spa 'retail and product knowledge' (48%) and 'operational management' (33%) are also desired (Exhibit 18).

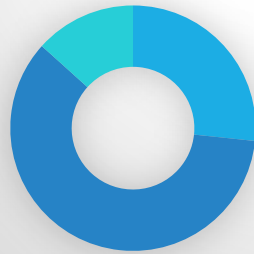
### Exhibit 14: What time of year are you searching for potential students?



#### Other responses:

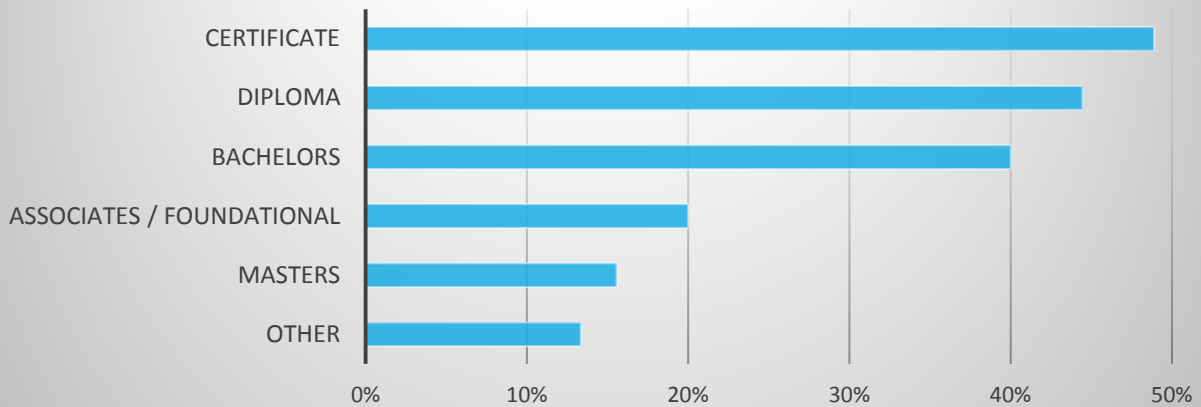
Depends on the individual and spa needs; Every 6 months (Jan/Feb and July/Aug); Year Round; Last Quarter, so that training starts in the New Year; and Low Season (May-July).

**Exhibit 15: What is the level of difficulty in finding and securing students for your experiential learning program?**



- Easy (27%)
- Somewhat Difficult (60%)
- Difficult (13%)

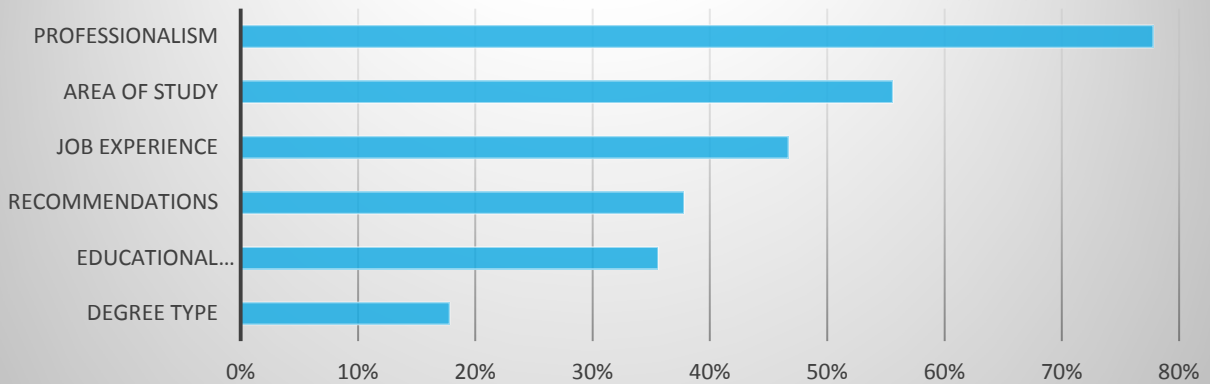
**Exhibit 16: What type of degree program candidates do you target?**



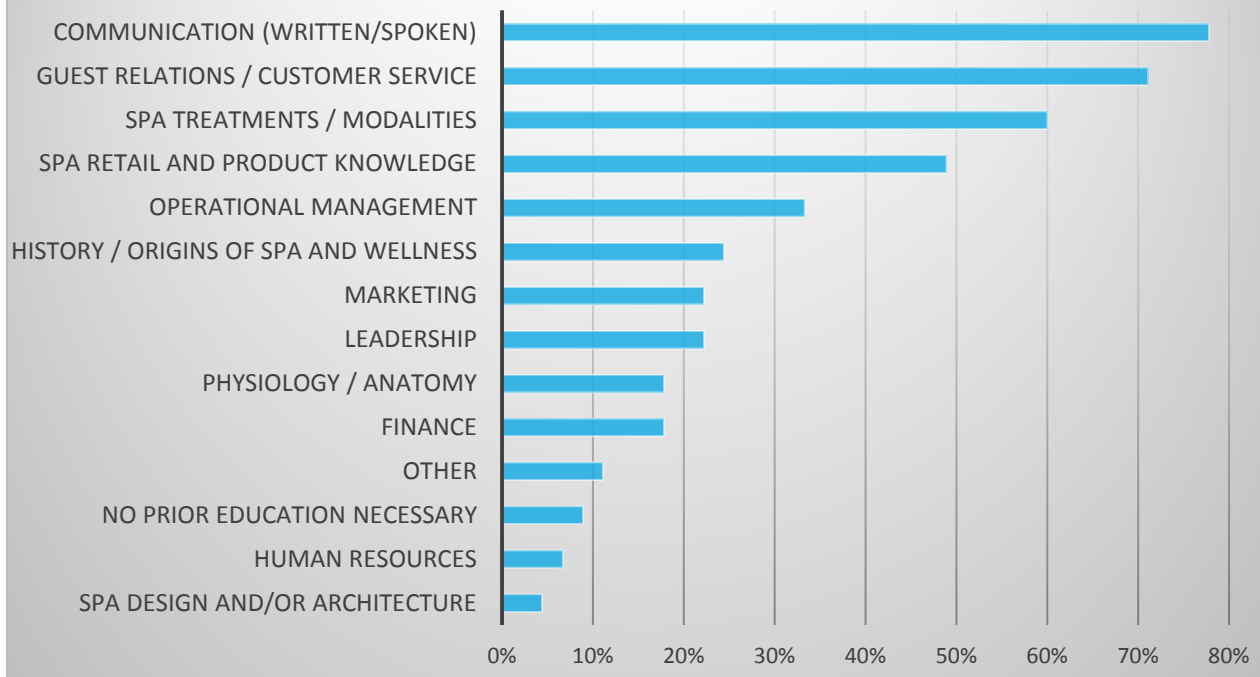
**Other responses:**

Those entering esthetic courses at local colleges or private schools; Sometimes co-op high school students; Team members within the company looking to grow; Student in first or second course of hospitality management or tourism; None in particular.

**Exhibit 17: What are the MOST important factors when choosing a candidate for your experiential learning program?**



### Exhibit 18: What subject matter is important for your candidates to have experience in, prior to working with you?



**Other responses:**

Our Internship programs is for spa attendants; Hospitality Management; Depends on the situation and needs

**Program Compensation**

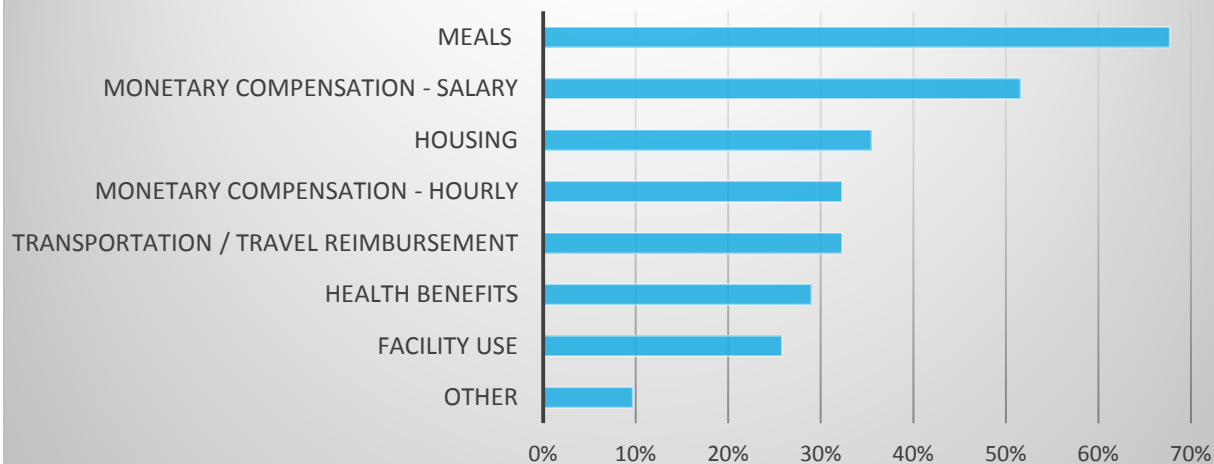
The majority of establishments (68%) running experiential learning programs (ELPs) use monetary compensation to attract and engage their students (Exhibit 19).

Salary is offered 52% of the time and an hourly rate is offered to 32% of program participants. In addition to monetary compensation, complimentary ‘meals’ are the most offered benefit to program participants at 68%. ‘Housing’ (36%), ‘transportation’ (32%), ‘health benefits’(29%) and ‘facility usage’ (26%) are also being offered and although not as often (Exhibit 20).

### Exhibit 19: Is the experiential learning program compensated monetarily or otherwise?



### Exhibit 20: What benefits do the participants in your establishment's experiential learning program receive?



**Other responses:**

‘Service Charge’ for spa treatments; Depends on the individual agreement or location.

### Perceived Value of Experiential Learning Programs

Survey respondents feel very strongly (97%) that experiential learning programs have a positive impact on a student’s success post-graduation (Exhibit 21). This should speak well to those establishments considering offering an ELP in the future, but also very importantly, to the educational institutions who may be contemplating adding ELPs to their curriculum.

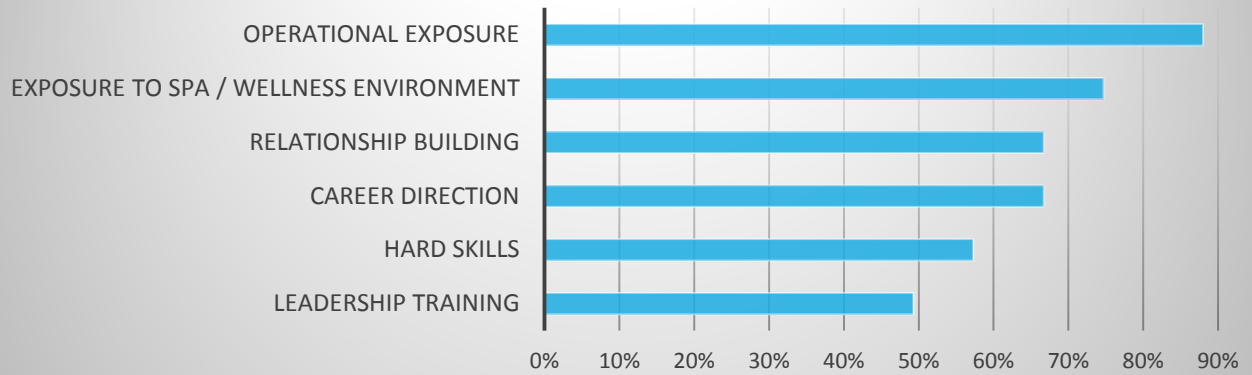
When asked to choose the most valuable take-aways from ELPs for students, ‘operational exposure’ came in first at 88% and ‘exposure to spa and wellness environment’ second at 74%. ‘Relationship building’ and ‘career direction’ tied at 66%, still positioning these two take-aways as important components of an ELP experience. ‘Hard skills’ came in at 57% and ‘leadership training’ at 49% (Exhibit 22).

A large percentage (80%) of those establishments who host ELPs have full-time employment opportunities available upon completion of the program (Exhibit 23) and 89% believe it is beneficial to their establishment to host an ELP (Exhibit 24). While ‘recruitment’ and ‘fresh insight’ are the two most important reasons for hosting an ELP, 50% of establishments also feel strongly about ‘giving back’ to the industry, which is a proud and dignified position to hold (Exhibit 25). Ninety-six percent of establishments surveyed would recommend other establishments implement an ELP (Exhibit 26).

### Exhibit 21: Do you feel experiential learning programs positively impact a students' success post-graduation?



**Exhibit 22: What do you think are the students most valuable 'take-aways' from experiential learning programs?**



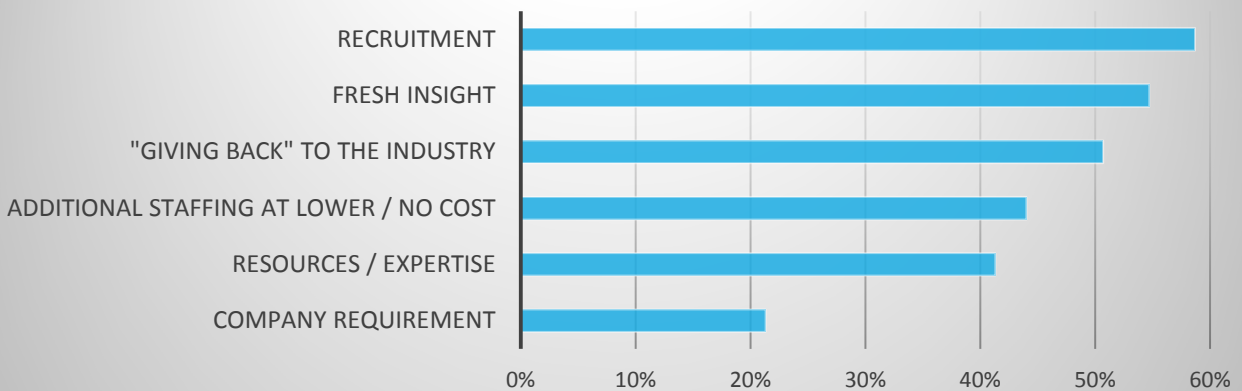
**Exhibit 23: Is there an opportunity at your establishment for full-time employment when the experiential learning program ends?**



**Exhibit 24: Do you feel your experiential learning program is beneficial for your establishment?**



### Exhibit 25: What are the MOST important reasons for having an experiential learning program?



### Exhibit 26: Would you recommend other establishments implement an experiential learning program?



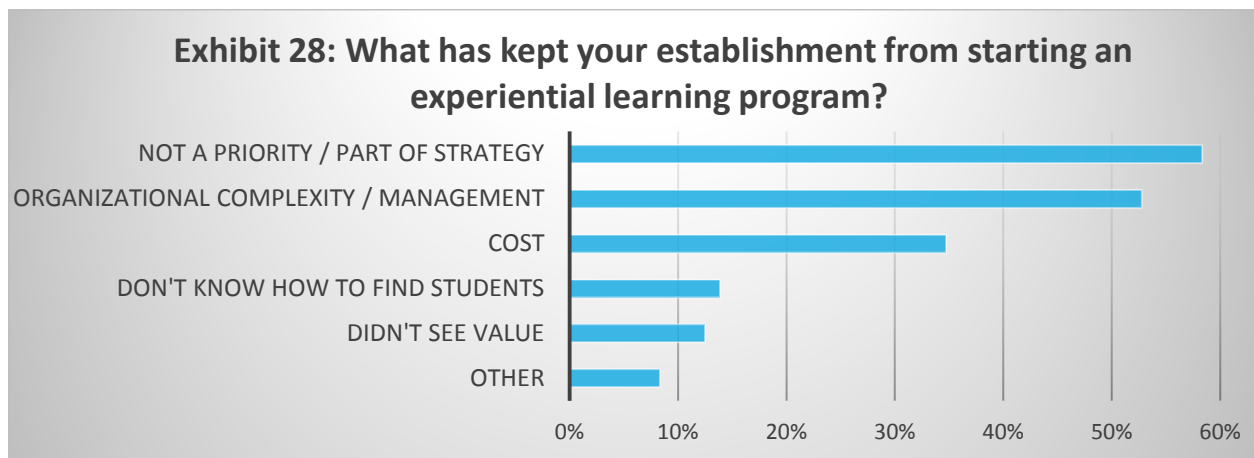
### Exhibit 27: What value and benefits have you enjoyed from hosting an experiential learning program? (Responses were 'optional')

- We have had students who learned from us and when graduating have also been employed with us. It helps to determine if the student can be a good employee in the spa industry.
- Although we don't have a structured program, I probably hire about 50% of my co-op students and the retention is always better since they already know what the job will be like.
- More buy in and understanding from team members.
- Giving students the ability to discover the real life working environment and how hard it actually is. It also gives insight as to what area of spa they would like more. If the student knows where they are most comfortable I feel they will last longer in the industry instead of getting frustrated, burnt out and leaving the industry all together.
- These types of programs further confirm the type of team members we wish to have join our team. Some of these programs have led to successful transitions into employment with us.
- Hosting experiential learning programs allows us to develop leading team skills of the person supervising the internship as you see in a short time a very fast development. Also to learn how to approach new generations, as communication and leadership is completely different, provides the opportunity to increase and practice different management approaches. If there is a position in the department at the end of the internship to recruit them, it is amazing to see the development they experience from the beginning. Another thing is that also you create branding in terms of being recognized as a place where professionals want to work, so this allows us to increase the level when recruiting new colleagues as more applications are received.
- Rewarding watching people grow and be exposed to this wonderful industry.

- Not so much in my current capacity, but in previous positions: growing talent is not only immeasurably beneficial to the individual's career growth, but it actually enables the MGNT team to delegate assorted projects/initiatives to these new (hungry) individuals.
- Inspire students in wellness environment and instill knowledge of spa operation so that they can build an interest in their career path.
- To build a pool of fresh talent to fuel the growth of the company. To offer students the opportunity to gain more hands-on experience so that they can be a well-rounded spa operator.
- Fresh insight from young motivated and bright individuals who have not been molded into a corporate or company culture. Questioning norms and best practices - being innovative and providing a fresh set of eyes on an operation.
- The value of seeing individuals grow and develop within the industry, imparting new skills to their new employees.
- We have used this for many years and have some fantastic employees that are now working full time. It is a way for us to get access to highly educated and passionate staff that can grow within the company, and it is a way for them to really decide on their career choice.
- Some students have looked at the business as a complete outsider and have made some wonderful suggestions to improve.
- Exploring new ideas.
- Giving back and getting possible new talent.
- Our MIT program is great because it exposes the spa/wellness department to our candidates who otherwise would not have any exposure to our department. I really enjoy opening their eyes to the benefits of working in a spa and our work environment. It is very rewarding to inspire someone to have passion for spa/wellness.
- Internal colleague investment.
- We are changing lives and building careers for people in the Caribbean who would otherwise have limited job options. We are also raising the level of our current therapists to international standards.

### ***Aspects Discouraging Experiential Learning Programs***

As a reason to what has kept establishments from starting or implementing ELPs, the majority of the answers came in as 'not a priority or part of their strategy' (58%) and 'organizational complexity' (53%). As always and ranking third here, 'cost' is a also factor (35%). Thirteen percent stated they 'didn't see the value' and also 13% noted they 'don't know how to find students' (Exhibit 28).



## Potential Experiential Learning Programs

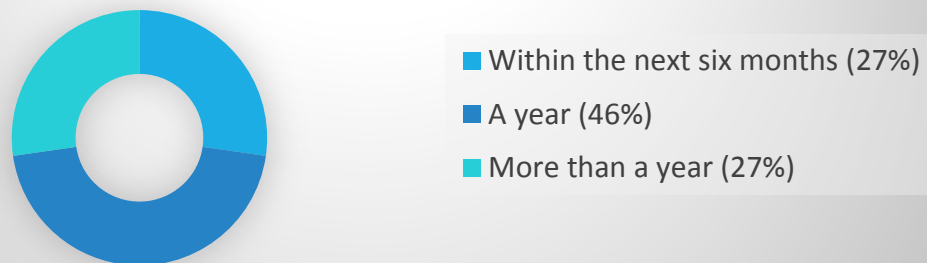
When asked if their establishment was considering adding an ELP, answers were almost equally split (Exhibit 29) and almost 50% of those responding with a 'yes' indicated that they anticipate offering an experiential opportunity within 1 year (Exhibit 30). Those interested were mainly considering Internships (67%) and MIT (64%) programs (Exhibit 31).

An additional comment provided in regards to the reasons for not having the programs was that, 'Internships are challenging to accommodate due to training required'. It was also pointed out that some kind of 'other' job training might be more widely accepted in the hotel industry, as labor costs are highest within a spa and wellness operation.

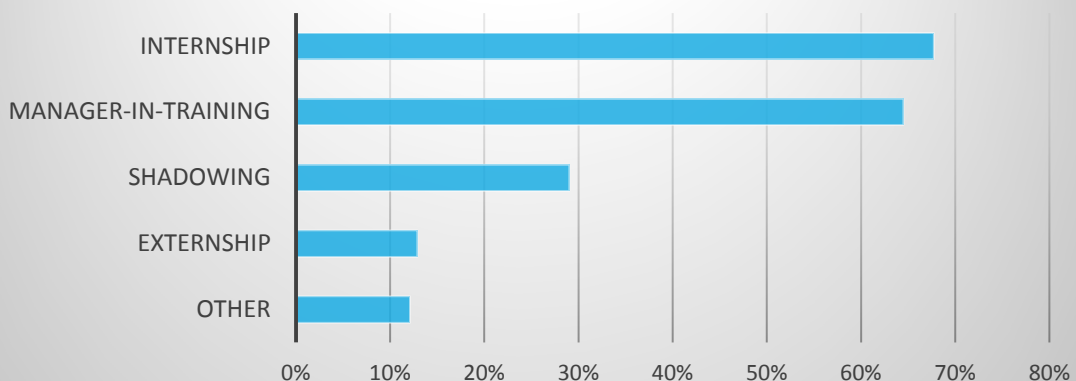
**Exhibit 29: Is your establishment considering starting an experiential learning program?**



**Exhibit 30: When does your establishment anticipate offering experiential learning opportunities?**



**Exhibit 31: What type of experiential learning programs are being considered?**





## Summary

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The Global Internship Program survey revealed that experiential learning programs are good for business. Businesses in the spa and wellness industry are already using experiential learning programs and have proven that formal internships and manager-in-training programs are not only popular, but are the preferred method of those executing ELPs.

The fact that 51% of respondents currently without ELPs are planning to implement one, demonstrates the need for industry standards and best practices to meet the growing demand. Bridging the gap of opportunity and implementation lies in helping companies make financial sense of the cost and how to find the right candidate for career training. Reassessing the value of such programs is important because proper execution of an experiential learning program can lead to reduced costs of recruitment and employee turnover. Therefore, resulting in the businesses being able to focus on industry growth and expansion.

Partnerships between educational institutions and establishments must continue to be encouraged and vigorously pursued in order to ensure a constant stream of available talent. If these challenges can be met and resolved, the industry of spa and wellness can enjoy expansive growth for years to come.

The Global Internship Programs' objectives are to provide our industry with complimentary resources and sources, including two Survey Reports, of which this is one of; a newly developed manual titled 'Global Best Practices for the Spa and Wellness Industry', as well as additional tools to assist companies in establishing experiential learning programs within their schools and businesses. Our main future objective is to create a website portal where spa management students and industry professionals can easily connect with available spa and wellness experiential learning programs. If you supervise a spa management program and would be interested in completing the survey, please email [kate@spaandwellnesscareers.com](mailto:kate@spaandwellnesscareers.com).

**On behalf of the Global Internship Program Committee,**

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