

Supporting future professionals: Students' perceptions of the value of internships

MEGHAN K. DOVE, PHD

NIKKI DIGREGORIO, PHD

KATY GREGG, PHD



**GEORGIA
SOUTHERN**
UNIVERSITY

Background

- Primary goal of family science internships is to provide opportunity for application of academic knowledge (Ballard & Carroll, 2005)
- Community-based learning is recognized as an effective pedagogy that can also work to better society (Zlotkowski & Duffy, 2010)
- Community-based learning is positively correlated with shifts in perceptions of self, abilities, and attitude towards community involvement (Celio, Durlak, & Dynmnicki, 2011)

Background

- Research examining which aspects of family science program curricula are most helpful to students during internships and upon entering the field is often scarce
- Students' internship experiences can greatly impact their perceptions about their career choices, as well as the role they play in enacting change in the community (Gonyea & Kozak, 2014)

Research questions

- Do students' perceptions of their CHFD coursework and of the opportunities for applying CHFD knowledge influence the overall value they place on the internship experience?
 - If so, how?
 - Does this continue across time?

Model for family science internship

1. Preparing a meaningful POS for each CHFD emphasis area (Child Development, Family Services, and Child Life)
2. Utilizing an internship committee and the entire CHFD faculty
 - Detailed internship manual
 - Internship site application process
 - Site specific learning objectives
3. Maintaining communication with students and site supervisors during the internship

Data collection

- Since 2014, 271 students have completed CHFD internships
- Pre-career survey = 56.4% response rate
- 3 months+ post-survey = 21.4% response rate
- 12.9% of sample responded to both surveys
- Surveys included qualitative and quantitative items

Univariate Results

	Pre-Career Survey		Post-Career Survey	
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev
Internship was a valuable learning experience.	3.84	.371	3.72	.590
Emphasis area prepared me for internship experience.	3.27	.819	3.54	.803
Internship was a good fit for CHFD emphasis area (Child Development/Child Life/Family Services).	3.71	.522	3.65	.668
Internship provided opportunities to apply CHFD knowledge.	3.67	.498	3.58	.596
Internship provided opportunities to be involved in professional level projects.	3.66	.564	3.42	.755

Regression Results

	Pre-Career			Post-Career		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error	Beta
Emphasis area prepared me for internship experience.	-.04	.03	-.09	-.01	.1	-.07
Internship was a good fit for CHFD emphasis area (Child Development/Child Life/Family Services).	.14	.04	.20*	.33	.12	.39**
Internship provided opportunities to apply CHFD knowledge.	.12	.06	.16*	.13	.17	.13
Internship provided opportunities to be involved in professional level projects.	.39	.05	.48**	.26	.10	.33*
R ²		.44			.45	
F		29.52**			10.50**	

* p <.05. **p<.01

Theoretical framework

Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 2006; Rotter, 1966)

Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986; Smith, Hamon, Ingoldsby, & Miller, 2008)

- Perceptions of students as critical to professional development (Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg, & Pollio, 2017)

Qualitative results: Emergent themes

1. Empowerment; self-confidence

“During my internship, I found my voice”

“Internship gave me the courage and inspiration to be fully engaged at my job..It helped me realize my potential.”

“I realized how much self-doubt and fear I had when faced with uncomfortable and new situations. This fear and doubt really hindered my performance in the first few weeks of my internship. Thankfully I was able to...take steps to gain more confidence in myself. “

“A text book cannot teach me how to be empathetic when people are in crisis.”

“I learned that I really did know a lot more than I gave myself credit for... I was able to provide suggestions and help strengthen some areas of the school with my knowledge of child development.”

Qualitative results: Emergent themes

2. Conscious application of coursework

“My CHFD coursework gave me a strong, unwavering foundation for my child life career...the simple lessons that were modeled to me by my professors, such as professionalism, respect, expectations, and team work.”

“Everything I do involves my CHFD coursework. Whether I'm giving a presentation, planning a program, or finding ways to make lessons and activities appropriate for a specific age group, my CHFD coursework is put at work every single day.”

“I realized that I did learn a lot during my classes and was able to actively apply it...The internship took me out of my comfort zone and allowed me to be able to show what I had been learning.”

Qualitative results: Emergent themes

3. Solidified or reshaped career goals

“I learned that I don't want to work in a classroom...I love children but teaching them is not my true passion.”

“My internship solidified my goal of working with victims of domestic violence.”

“The internship showed me that I do enjoy working with low income families and that, as hard as case management is, it is worth the effort if I am able to help at least one family.”

Discussion & Implications

1. Redesign program objectives, course objectives, creating new courses to meet needs, and curriculum mapping
2. Facilitate student understanding through an extensive internship manual
3. Adopt the application and review process
4. Assist students with writing site specific learning objectives
5. Ensure assignments are meaningful: Reflection journals, campus meetings, capstone project
6. Maintain contact with site supervisors and do site visits when able/necessary

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