

# Designing and Assessing Internship Programs in the Social Sciences

By

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*Abstract:* Scholarship on the role of professional development opportunities for undergraduate students in the social sciences has highlighted the growing importance of internship programs. With the significant increase in numbers of internship programs, different models have emerged. Internship programs vary on key dimensions including integration of academic content, development of internship offerings (publically available vs. specially designed internships); placement process (self-select vs. guided), and student assessment methods. This paper compares three models of internship programs at the University of Southern California: a “traditional” model in which students engage in different types of political science related internships; a research focused internship program in political science, and an environmental internship program that includes environmental science, policy, and education focused internships. The paper evaluates these programs by examining organizational and process variables; the impact of internships; and participant satisfaction. We use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including a specially designed participants survey. The results demonstrate that the value of internship programs provide a variety of benefits for their undergraduate populations, and that different models can provide similarly high impact and satisfaction levels.

**Key Words:** Internships, Assessment, Research, Pedagogy, Experiential Learning

There was a day and time when a college degree was evaluated primarily by its intellectual depth, and when graduating from a university was sufficient to ensure gainful employment. However, as times have changed, so too have the requirements for entering the working world. Internships have proven to be a necessary key to achieve this end. Internships give students an opportunity to gain useful work experience, and perhaps more importantly, an understanding of the type of work they might want to enter into after graduation. Although most undergraduates tend to think of internship programs in a similar vein, e.g., work experience; the truth is that not all internship programs are the same. This paper will compare three internships programs offered at the University of Southern California and assess the impact of each program on the student population that participated in the programs as well as evaluate the organizational and process components of the programs.

### **Value of Internships**

Internships are very popular with many employing organizations, educational institutions and students (Coco 2000, Hall et al., 1996, Sides and Mrvica,

2007; Maertz, Stoeberl and Marks 2014, 123). Internships are generally defined as a structured and career relevant work experience obtained by students prior to graduation from an academic program (Taylor, 1988; Maertz, Stoeberl and Marks, 125). “University training programs have relied on internships to immerse students in real world experiences for over a century” (Lehman and Quick 2011, 2). The value of internships for undergraduates is well established. Although students often perform well in their academic courses, there are many things that classes simply cannot teach in order to prepare them for their careers (Kelley and Gaedeke 1990; Kelly and Bridges 2005; Kim, Kim and Bzullak 2011, 696).

Students who participate in internship programs come from a range of disciplines, and typically, they are in the final year of their degree program with their eyes firmly fixed on a future career. An internship program provides an opportunity for work-based learning, which is a pedagogical shift that has become “part of the landscape of higher education” (Boud & Solmon 2001; Carson and Fisher 2006, 701). Internship experiences provide numerous benefits to students and employers<sup>1</sup>. Such programs allow students to develop important skills, apply skills learned in the classroom to real world problems, understand different theories they have learned in the classrooms, and become more familiar with real world practices (Kim, Kim and Bzullak 696; Richards 1984; Gault and Schlager 2000).

A well-designed internship expands the knowledge and skills of candidates while also gauging their ability to apply new learning in authentic settings as they contend with problems that have real world consequences. Built right, the internship becomes a sturdy vessel upon which new practitioners can navigate the swift, unpredictable currents that separate classroom theory and on-the-job reality (Fry, Bottoms, and O’Neill 2005, 3; Shoho, Barnett and Martin 2012, 161).

When offering internships programs, one of the most important concerns of universities and faculty is whether students achieve the desired learning outcomes from the internship program (Elkins 2002; Kim, Kim and Bzullak 696). It is clear that faculty must provide input throughout internships to help the students develop

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<sup>1</sup> Employers and partner organizations are used interchangeably throughout the paper.

their interpersonal skills, dependability, and initiative (Kim, Kim and Bzullak 697; Raymond, McNabb, and Matthaehi 1993). The structure of an internship program is an important factor in providing high quality and productive internship experience (Gryski, Johnson, and O'Toole 1987; Kim, Kim and Bzullak 696). Well-planned internship activities prove to be valuable learning opportunities (Brow-Ferrigno & Mult 2004; Lehman and Quick 2).

### **Assessing Internship Programs**

Little has been written in scholarship on the systematic assessment of internship programs, which may be the result of the fact that such programs are often designed to meet the specific needs of the academic institution and student population. That said, Maertz et al. have identified four variables that can be used to maximize the benefits of internship programs while minimizing costs. The first of these variables involves designing internships that meet the needs of the interns and the employers, while ensuring that some academic goals are achieved. This makes logical sense, as schools want to ensure that the assignment and internship requirements provide a true complement in content and pedagogy to traditional classes (Maertz et al., 132).

A second variable involves agents of the school communicating clearly and frequently with employers to foster and cultivate the school-employer relationship. Relationships between provider and the school are essential for meaningful internship experiences for students, as well as continued stable internships, full-time job placements, sponsorships, and even possible donations. Third, in order to facilitate the above two variables, schools must ensure accurate and up-to-date record keeping of data for all participants in the internship. This recordkeeping should include work content for each internship, faculty and employer evaluations, whether employment was obtained with company either before or after graduation, and current contact information for both the employer and student. Lastly, to avoid any legal liability, the school should inform the employer about its obligations to comply with relevant employment laws (Maertz et al., 135-6).

In our evaluation of the three programs, we use three types of criteria: 1. Organizational and process variables 2. Impact variables, 3. Participant satisfaction. The organizational and process variables we use include two of Maertz et al. above mentioned variables: internships design that meets the needs of interns and employers while ensuring that some academic goals are achieved; and consistent communication between program staff and participating organizations. We also use a third organizational and process variable - professional training and guidance.

For the assessment of impact, research suggests that in evaluating outcomes of experiential learning, it is useful to assess impact in several different areas including personal growth, employment, and civic (Conway, Amel, & Gerwein, 2009; Raman & Pashupati, 2010). In order to evaluate possible impacts in these areas we conducted a special survey, collecting information from students in the three programs. The survey was sent to a total of 405 current and former USC students who participated in one of the programs between January 2015 and December 2017, with an estimated 40 students to have taken the program more than once, the number of potential respondents is 365<sup>2</sup>. The survey was administered online between February and March 2018 and the replies were anonymous. We received 100 responses following three email requests (with no incentives offered).

Following the assessment of impact, we assess participant satisfaction using questions from the survey. The questions referred to student satisfaction from the internship program, the organization they interned with, and overall satisfaction from the internship experience.

The paper first discusses key features of the three USC internship programs, and then moves on to an evaluation of the programs based on organizational and process variables, impact on students, and participant satisfaction.

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the anonymous nature of the survey we had to limit each respondent to one response. Students were therefore instructed to refer to their most recent internship if they had enrolled more than once. Out of the total of 405 recipients of the survey invitation about 40 students took the program more than once. Thus, the total number of interns receiving a survey request was 365, of which an estimated 180 are still enrolled at USC.

### **Three Internship Programs at the University of Southern California**

For several decades, the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at the University of Southern California has offered a traditional internship program where the Institute acts as a facilitator for students to gain political internships in and around the Los Angeles area. Students come to the Institute and are evaluated by the staff for their experience and areas of interest. The staff is then able to match the students' qualifications to several internship providers that work with Unruh. After resumes and cover letters are prepared by the students and in consultation with the staff, the Institute applies on behalf of the student to one or more internships. Upon completion of a brief interview and acceptance by the provider, the student is then registered into the internship class (Political Science 395) and is able to obtain academic credit for the time they spend at the internship along with meeting several other academic requirements. After offering these traditional internships to students for many years, the staff came to recognize students interest in internships focused on intensive research on a particular public policy area, such as education, environment, criminal justice and the like. We therefore created a guided internship program that facilitates policy research. The program is also beneficial to those students who cannot travel off campus for an internship. Students are admitted to the program following an interview, and are able to obtain academic credit in the same way as students in the traditional internship program.

The USC Environmental Internship Program was created in 2015 in response to a growing interest among students in the Environmental Studies Program in integrating internships that focus on environmental work into their college experience. The program facilitates internships in environmental government and non-governmental organizations dealing with environmental policy and advocacy, environmental science, and environmental education. The program is fairly small, admitting about 15 students each semester. Most of the internships are especially designed for students in the program, and are not publically available, as they are developed in collaboration with the partner organizations. The faculty director meets with the student applicants to identify qualifications and areas of interest,

and students then apply for an internship. Once they are accepted into an internship, following an interview with the partner organization, students can then register for the class and obtain academic credit for the time they spend on the internship and other academic requirements.

### **The Internship Providers**

The first major hurdle to cross in creating a successful internship program is identifying internship providers that would offer meaningful internships and work with students over the course of a semester. In the case of the traditional internship program, we created a list of more than 200 potential employers in the Los Angeles area, which includes political consulting firms, City and County Council offices, and political campaigns. We have ongoing contact with most of these organizations, and had many repeated placements with them over the years. This gives us better information about the quality of the internship experience, and offers students consistent supervision.

For the research internship program, which is significantly smaller, the main challenge was to identify intensive research projects. Initially, USC had been approached by Project Vote Smart (“PVS”) to have USC students assist in their research.<sup>3</sup> However, after 18 months, the university and PVS ended their relationship and the need for a research internship provider continued.

The following year, the Unruh Institute reached out to California Strategies, LLC, a public strategy firm, to gauge their interest in partnering with USC. They work on a number of policy areas that include energy, environment regulations, green technology, health care, land use, water use and the like. After a series of conversations, we established a model in which three groups of student interns (5 students per group) worked directly with three principal partners at California Strategies on different policy areas. Following initial meetings to develop the research agenda, the partners would meet in person with their students on a

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<sup>3</sup> PVS is a non-partisan, non-governmental organization that works at educating the American public on the political stances of candidates running for public office. Seeking candidates’ true positions on controversial policy issues such as abortion, the economy, and immigration, interns in essence fact-check the truth behind candidates’ statements.

monthly basis for progress checks, with students having continued access to their partners via e-mail and/or phone conversations. After running the program during the 2012 – 2013 academic year, we added other research partners over the years, including: Parent Revolution (education policy), National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) (civil engagement and immigration policy), River LA (environmental policy), Los Angeles Councilman David Rye’s Office (College Savings Accounts – education policy) and Skid Row Trust (homeless policy), to name a few. Having multiple partners has reduced the burden on the organizations and has allowed for greater sustainability in the future.

The environmental internship program was created in order to develop opportunities for students to gain meaningful internship experiences in a variety of environmental areas. Prior to the academic approval of the program, the director worked with local environmental government and non-governmental organizations in order to create new internships for our students. The organizations had high needs for interns, and were therefore interested in creating partnership with the USC program<sup>4</sup>. We worked with about 15 organizations, leading to the creation of about 30 internships focused on environmental issues. Many of these internships were only open to students participating in the USC environmental internship program. The program has placed students repeatedly with most of these organizations. The continued relationship has facilitated effective communication, excellent matching of candidates, and rich experiences for the students.

#### **Selecting the Interns and Setting the Internship Plan**

Our traditional internship program is not capped in terms of how many students can participate in any given semester, and usually has 40 to 60 participants every semester. However, the research internship program is capped at 10 students per semester with 5 students assigned to each policy partner. Applications are accepted in the first three weeks of the semester and students are selected based upon several criteria, including, their area of interest, year in school, grade point

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<sup>4</sup> Increasingly, both governmental and non-governmental organizations are required/choose to hire interns who receive academic credit for their internship, often due federal/state funding restrictions.



average and availability to conduct the research required. Once students are selected and accept their policy group they can register for the class.

In the first week after the research interns are selected, the interns are required to attend a research skills seminar run through the USC library, focusing on various Internet search engines and other library resources. In addition, partner organizations often put students in touch with people working within regulatory agencies and/or within a particular industry in order to gain valuable information. Thus, the combination of traditional research conducted through the library and/or the Internet along with additional sources from the policy partners lays the basis for students' research. The partners along with the Unruh staff and students then craft a research agenda with the overarching goal that students will conduct individual research as part of a broader research question. Students are also required to include a field research component, such as personal interviews or large-scale surveys, into their research agenda.

The environmental internship program conducts the admission process prior to the beginning of each semester. Students meet with the program director to discuss their interests and possible internships options. We work with the student on the applications, which are then forwarded to one or two organizations. Conducting the application process prior to the beginning of the semester allows all students to begin their internship on the first week of classes and have a longer experience in the internship. This makes a significant difference for the organizations we work with as well, though it does add to the advance time investment of running the program.

Once they begin their internships, participants in all three programs have regular meetings with program faculty and staff to discuss their progress, and related professional development issues. In the research internship program, students receive more specific assistance in refining the nature of the research and in order to ensure that the students have necessary direction on the project. At bi-monthly meetings, each student gives an update both orally and in writing in terms of their progress of their research. Students also meet with the research partner

organization approximately halfway through the semester, to discuss the progress of their research and to receive additional suggestions.

In the environmental internship program, students have several required class meetings in which they report about their work and progress. The class meeting allows student to learn about other internships and the experience of students in different types of organizations. In addition, at least one meeting is devoted to professional development issues, usually including a guest speaker from one of the organizations we work with. As in the research internship program, participation in the meetings count towards a portion of the students grade in the class.

### **Final Presentation and Final Report**

As the semester starts to move toward its conclusion, the research interns begin to prepare for their final presentation of the research and policy recommendations. The final presentation is conducted in a very professional manner with the students preparing a 30 - 40 minute power point presentation in which they summarize their research to an audience that includes their partner along with the other students in the program as well as the Unruh staff. It is not uncommon for research partners to invite special guests to sit in on the presentation, as the research may be relevant to those persons. After the presentation, students field questions from the partner and audience members for the remaining time.

In addition to the final presentation, each student in the research program is required to write an 8-10 page final policy report based on the research they conducted throughout the semester along with any policy recommendations being offered on the research question. The reports follow the typical format found in such writings, including an abstract, introduction, findings, conclusion and policy recommendations. The providers are given all of the reports created by the students.

Interns in the traditional program also have a writing assignment. Students are required to write a research paper that is designed to reinforce their internship experience. There are two benchmark assignments associated with the research

paper that takes place early on during the semester. Students must write a research proposal on their selected topic. Prior to submitting the proposal each intern meets with their instructor to discuss the direction of the research. Thereafter, students submit a detailed outline and annotated bibliography. Students are given comments on both assignments from the instructor. Both precursor assignments are designed to keep the students focused on their final research paper.

Students in the environmental internship program also have written paper assignments, including a final paper, and give a comprehensive power-point presentation at the end of the semester. Occasionally, other students who expressed interest in the program are invited to this session. In their power point presentation, students report about their work, and reflect on their internship experience, and the organization they worked with. As in the two other programs, the presentation and a final paper account for a portion of the students' grade.

### **Evaluation of Internship Programs**

In this section we examine the three programs using the following sets of variables: 1. Organizational and Process variables 2. Impact variables 3. Participants' satisfaction.

#### **Organizational and Process variables**

A central aspect in evaluating internship programs is the extent to which internships are designed to meet the needs of the interns and the employers, while ensuring that some academic goals are achieved. The three programs emphasize the integration of the internship into students' academic program of study. While the research internship is built on a combination of employers' needs and student research, the other two programs use several campus-based academic components including pre-internship orientations, internship seminars/workshops, academic readings, written assignments, class meetings, and regularly scheduled meetings between intern and faculty mentors or internship director. Academic assignments in all three programs include progress reports, research papers, and evaluative and self-assessment essays.

With more resources and staff, both the traditional and research internship programs offer more organized professional development workshops and activities, while the environmental internship program offers significant group and individual mentoring. Students in all three internship programs are required to participate in several professionalization events to help prepare them for life after graduation. In the traditional and research programs, students attend an Interview Skills Workshop that bring in professionals from political offices, political consulting firms and non-governmental organizations. After a 30 minute moderated discussion, a series of mock interviews takes place so that the students can get sense of how interviews are actually conducted. Students are also required to attend a Job Forum Workshop in which professionals from various employment sectors come together in an intimate setting. Participants typically work within politically elected offices, government agencies, political consulting firms and non-governmental organizations. After a 45-minute moderated panel discussion, the participants break-out into different parts of the room and the students are then allowed to speak with the participants in an informal setting gaining information about how one gets involved in certain types of work from those who work within those areas. The over-arching goal of this program is simple, educate students about how one gains employment in various work sectors.

A third element of professionalization in the traditional and research internship programs is mentoring. The Unruh Institute is fortunate to have enlisted approximately 30 professionals from both the public and private sectors who volunteer their time to work with students. The individuals, known as the “Unruh Fellows,” often participate in panel discussions on campus regarding various political issues of the day. In addition, the fellows also meet once a semester with a small group of students and speak with them over coffee about the type of work that they are involved in.

The final element of the research internship program requires the interns to attend two political events during the semester and submit a short memorandum regarding what the nature of the event, who spoke, what was said and their personal perspective on the topic. The goal for this aspect of the program is to

ensure that students are not solely learning within the classroom but engaging in policy issues that affect them and others.

The environmental internship program, being a smaller program with limited resources and no support staff, offers fewer professional development opportunities. Yet, every student in the program participates in several professional development events/discussions. Since the program admits only about 15 students each semester, we also offer significant mentoring which includes several individual meetings with the program director to discuss the student's work experience and future professional goals. In addition, since students intern in different types of organizations, they share their work experiences in class meetings. We also hold one three-hour class meeting dedicated entirely to professional development issues. In this meeting student raise questions and discuss work related challenges and experiences. Additionally, every semester we have a guest lecturer from one of the organizations we work with to discuss the transition from internship to full time employment. Students are also encouraged to participate in other professional development opportunities on campus.

On-going communication between the internship program and participating organizations is critical for the success of interns. Such communication contributes to designing a meaningful work plan, setting expectations, and can support intern performance. The three programs use different models of communication with participating organizations. The research internship program has a well-structured system of periodic communication with partner organizations. The traditional internship program has a dedicated staff member who reaches out to the internship providers to check on availability of internships in any given semester and to also check on the intern progress during the semester. In the environmental internship program, due to the small number of organizations, the program director communicates with supervisors in the participating organizations several times throughout the semester.

### **Impact Analysis of Internship Programs**

Internship programs provide unique opportunities for students to explore possible career paths and gain hands-on experience in the workplace while in

college. Internships have also become a fairly standard part of students' resume as they begin to seek employment or pursue professional graduate degrees. Naturally, internships vary on many dimensions including how closely their content relates to a student's academic degree, and the range of responsibilities a student receives and how much creativity and initiative are encouraged. A key aspect of evaluating internship programs however, is the type and extent of impact a program has on the students. In our analysis we focus on three main aspects: personal effects, professional and employment effects, and civic effects.

Personal growth outcomes center on an individual's knowledge, self-improvement, and inter-personal skills. Conway, Amel, and Gerwein (2009) showed that personal outcomes can change as a result of service learning.

For many students, improving employment prospects is the primary goal of the internship. As students move from a consumer of academic knowledge toward a professional career participating in an internship program provides a unique opportunity to experience a real world career setting. We will evaluate the impact of internships on professional development and employment by focusing on students' responses to questions on clarification of career paths and improvement of employment potential.

Civic effects of internships focus on one's sense of citizenship and awareness of social problems. Several studies suggested that students who participate in applied learning tend to score higher on civic responsibility (Myers-Lipton, 1998; Seon-Young, L., Olszewski-Kubilius, P., Weimholt, K., 2007).

### **Survey Design**

The study was conducted in the University of Southern California between February to March 2018. In order to assess the effects of internships on students we contacted 365 students who participated in at least one of three internship programs at USC. The survey was sent by email from the respective directors of the programs to all students who participated in one of the three programs between January 2015 in December 2017. Following the initial email request, two additional reminders were sent to participants. No incentives were offered to the participants for filling out the questionnaire.

The questionnaire included 24 questions, and had three parts (see appendix 1). In the first part questions focused on participant information, including during what year in school did they participate in the program, whether this was their first internship, and how many weekly hours did they spend in the internship. The second part focused on impact of the internship on personal growth, employment-related effects, and civic effects. The third part included questions on level of satisfaction from the internship experience, the partner organization, and the internship program.

### **Survey Results**

We received 100 responses to the survey (27%). We should note that a significant number of the participants who received the survey request already graduated from USC, and that no incentives were offered for filling out the questionnaire<sup>5</sup>.

Eight-five percent of all respondents were in their junior or senior year when they participated in the internship program (45% seniors and 40% juniors). This was the first internship for about one third (34%) of respondents, only 21% of whom were in their senior year. More than 70% of respondents were female. Most of the respondents (56%) participated in the traditional internship program (which is the largest of the three programs), 28% participated in the environmental internship program, and 16% in the research internship program. More than 80% of respondents used the resources of their respective programs to find and secure their internship, but there was some variation across the programs, only 7% of participants in the environmental internship program found the internship by themselves, compared with 27% of participants in the traditional internship program.

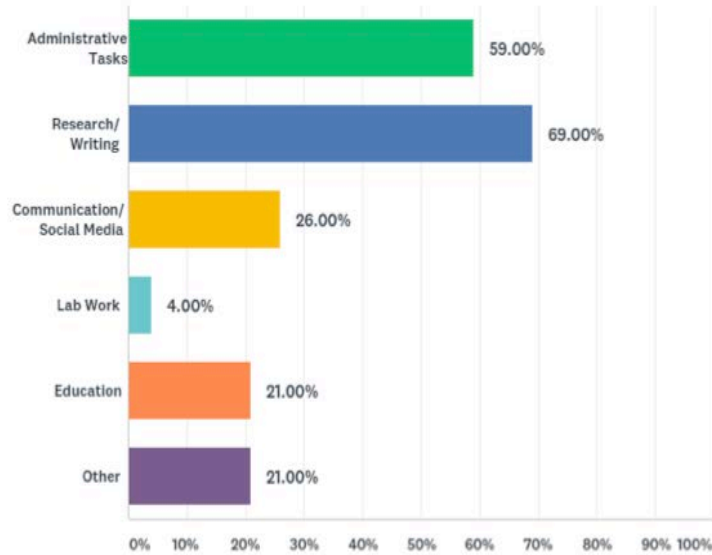
Students in the three programs engage in a variety of internship positions at different types of organizations. We asked participants about the content of their internship work (allowing them to choose up to two options from the following):

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<sup>5</sup> We thank Vanessa Yu for her excellent research assistance on the questionnaire.

## Graph 1. Internship Work Content

Did your internship work involve primarily (choose one or two categories as appropriate):

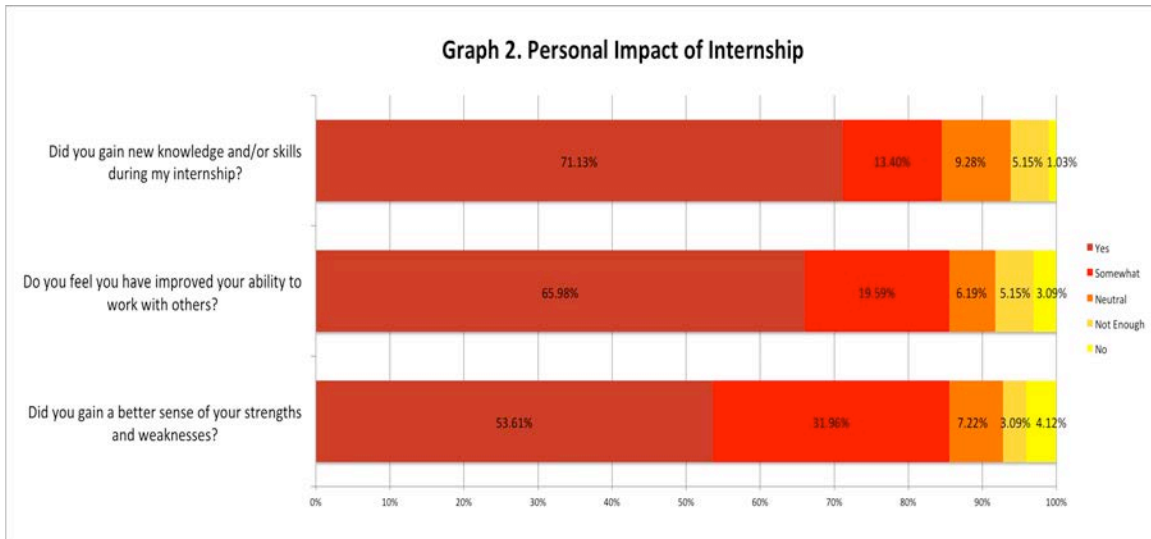


A large majority of students noted research and writing as a main aspect of their internship work, while administrative tasks were also included by a majority of students. In addition, about a quarter of respondents said their work involved primarily communication and social media related tasks, and about 21% (all environmental internship students) referred to education work.

In the second part of the questionnaire, we asked students a series of thirteen questions in order to evaluate their internship experience and its impact. The respondents used a five-point Likert scale (Yes, Somewhat, Neutral, Not Enough, and No) to rate their experiences. Given the importance of on-site guidance and supervision, students were asked whether they received appropriate guidance from the site supervisor in the beginning of the internship, and whether the supervisor or other co-workers were available to answer questions throughout the internship. Slightly more than 90% of respondents answered both questions positively (72% and 79% respectively answered Yes, and 19% and 11% respectively answered Somewhat).

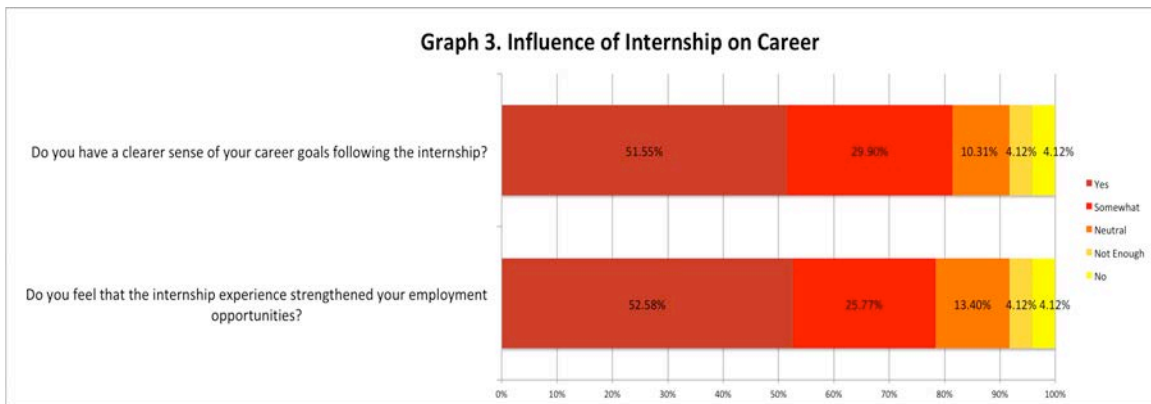


Students were then asked about the impact of the internship, with three of the questions referring to personal impact:



Large majorities of students from all three programs felt that they benefitted from the internship in terms of personal impact. About 85% of respondents felt they gained new knowledge and skills, and a similar percentage felt improvement in their ability to work with others. Furthermore, a similarly large majority of students felt they gained a better sense of their personal strengths and weaknesses as a result of their internship experience.

The Participants of the three programs were then asked about the influence of the internship on their career prospects. When deciding to participate in an internship program, advisers often hear from students that they are seeking to clarify to themselves possible career paths, and that they hope the internship will improve their employment potential. High proportions of participants in all three programs felt they achieved these goals, at least to some extent. When asked whether the internship helped them gain a clearer sense of their career goals, 52% answered Yes, and 30% said Somewhat. Asked whether they thought the internship experience strengthened their employment opportunities, 79% answered positively (53% Yes and 26% Somewhat).



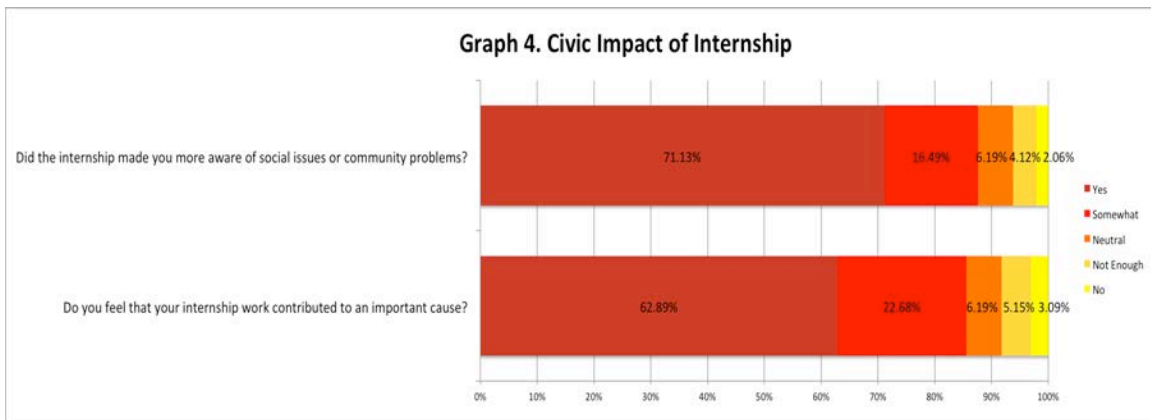
On both of these questions, there was some variation in responses across the three programs. Regarding clarity of career goals, a total of 81% of participants of the traditional internship program felt they had a clearer or somewhat clearer sense of their career goals, whereas in the research internship program the total was 73%, and in the environmental program the total percentage of those who felt a clearer sense of career goals following the internship was 86%.

Regarding whether the internship experience strengthened employment opportunities, while positive responses were very high in all three programs, there were some differences with 86% of participants in the environmental program answering positively, 80% in the traditional program, and 60% in the research internship program.

Whether participation in an internship program is pursued primarily for the purpose of professional development or for gaining academic credit, internships typically enhance the connection between academic learning and real world experience. Across the three programs, 74% of respondents indicated they were able to apply knowledge and skills from their academic studies to the internship to some extent (42% Yes, 32% Somewhat).

Another indicator of the effectiveness of an internship is civic impact. While many students seek internships for career reasons, many internships expose students to non-profit or other public interest organizations. Indeed, Knapp, Fisher, and Levesque- Bristol (2010, p.7) have argued that service learning can strengthen

students' commitment to future civic engagement. In our survey, an overwhelming majority of participants in the three programs (86%) indicated they felt that their internship contributed to an important cause (63% Yes, 23% Somewhat). An even higher majority of respondents (88%) said the internship made them more aware of social issues or community problems (71% Yes, 17% Somewhat).



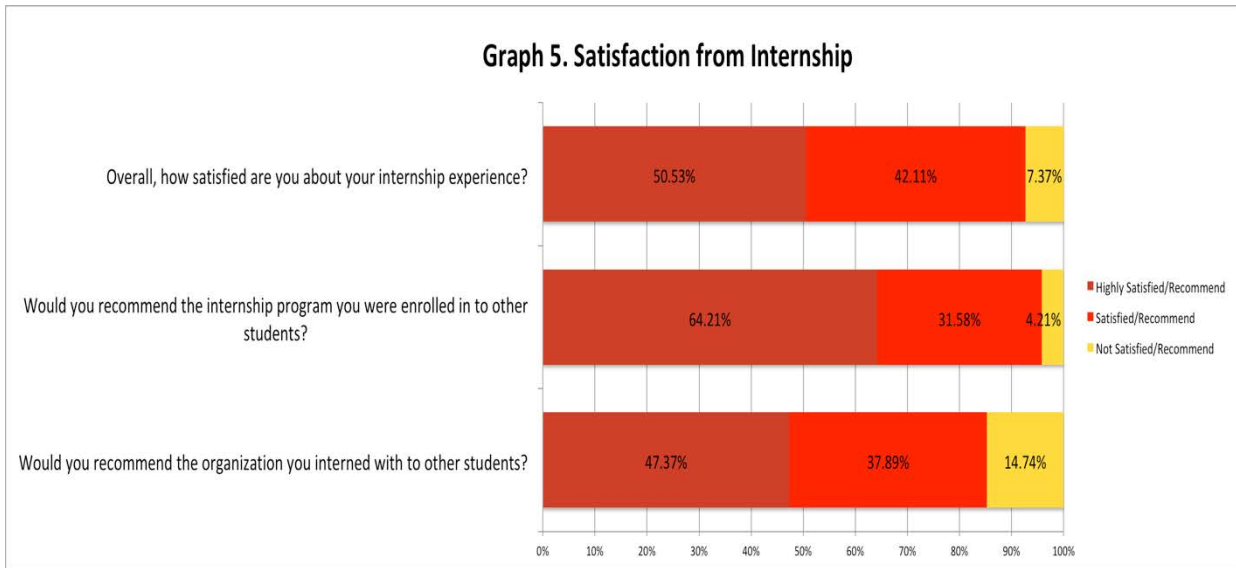
On a separate question, 62% of respondents stated their work was important for the operation and goals of the organization, and another 20% answered Somewhat on the same question. These results suggest that the internships in the three programs may have significantly contributed to a sense of social empowerment among a large majority of participants.

Taken together, the survey results suggest that internships in well-organized programs can provide a variety of benefits, including personal growth opportunities and civic empowerment, in addition to career related advantages. Internships in the three programs discussed here have had high impact in all three areas.

### **Participant Satisfaction**

The last section of the survey focused on student satisfaction. Overall, all three programs registered very high satisfaction levels on all three measures. On average across the three programs, 85% of students said they would highly recommend/recommend the organization they interned with to other students. An even higher majority of respondents (96%) said they would either highly recommend or recommend the internship program to other students. And overall,

93% of respondents said they were either highly satisfied or satisfied from their internship experience.



On all three measures of participant satisfaction there were significant differences across the three organizations in intensity of satisfaction (ratio of high satisfaction). High satisfaction from the overall internship experience varied between the two political science programs and the environmental internship program, with 48% of students in the traditional program and 47% of respondents in the research internship program saying they were highly satisfied from their overall internship experience, while 57% of respondents in the environmental internship program said they were highly satisfied from the overall internship experience. With regard to satisfaction from partner organizations, 57% of participants in the environmental internship program were highly satisfied, compared to 48% in the traditional program and 27% in the research internship program. The intensity of satisfaction from the internship program varies similarly, with 82% of respondents in the environmental program saying there were highly satisfied with the program compared with 61% in the traditional program and 40% in the research program. Overall, while there was a consistent difference in all three questions in the intensity of satisfaction across the programs, very high levels of satisfaction were registered in all three programs.

## **Conclusion**

The paper evaluates three internship programs that differ significantly in size, resources, focus, and length of time they have been in operation. However, all three programs serve the same population (USC students, mostly in junior and senior years), and place high emphasis on individual mentoring and on-going communication and continued relationship with partner organizations. Professional development activities in the traditional and research internship programs were more extensive than in the environmental internship program, while the latter emphasized careful designing of internships in collaboration with partner organizations, as well individual matching of students to specific internships.

More than 90% of participants in the three programs indicated satisfaction from the internship experience, the partner organization, and the internship program. While there were some differences across the programs in the intensity of satisfaction, the very high total ratios on all three indicators demonstrate that different models can produce high satisfaction levels.

Data from the above survey reveals significant benefits to student populations by participation in a variety of internship programs. Many believe that internship programs are primarily valued by students for post-graduate employment purposes. Our survey shows that more than 20% of participants were actually offered employment in the organizations they interned with following their internship. However, our data also points to additional benefits beyond career advantages. The vast majority of the students who participated in the above internships came away with greater knowledge of policy issues, learned how to work with others, gained a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and enhanced their own civic empowerment. In light of these findings, it should come as no surprise that more academic institutions are incorporating such internship opportunities for their undergraduate populations. Looking forward, one would anticipate a continued growth in the integration of well-organized internship programs into a growing variety of academic programs.

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Appendix 1.

*Participant Questionnaire*  
*USC Internship Program*

**I. Background Information**

1. Year in school (during internship):  
Senior \_\_\_ Junior \_\_\_ Sophomore \_\_\_ Freshman \_\_\_
2. Gender:  
Female \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_
3. Which internship program did you participate in? (choose one)  
POSC 395 (traditional) \_\_\_  
POSC 395 (research team) \_\_\_  
ENST 499/492 \_\_\_
4. Was this your first internship?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
5. How was your internship arranged? (Choose one answer that best describes the process)  
I found the internship and contacted the organization directly \_\_\_  
I was given a list of internships by the Internship Program and chose one from the list \_\_\_  
The Internship Program matched me with an organization that suited my interests \_\_\_
6. During a typical week, approximately how many hours did you work in your internship?  
6-8 \_\_\_ 9-12 \_\_\_ 13 or more \_\_\_
7. Did your internship work involve primarily (choose one or two categories as appropriate)  
Administrative tasks \_\_\_ Research/writing \_\_\_ Communication/Social Media \_\_\_  
Lab work \_\_\_ Education \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_

**II. Please rate the following statements regarding your internship experience (chose one answer for each question):**

((answer categories for this section-- Yes Somewhat neutral Not enough No))



8. Did you receive appropriate guidance from site supervisor at the *beginning* of the internship?
9. Were your site supervisor or co-workers available to answer your questions?
10. Was your work important for the operation and goals of the organization?
11. Were you able to apply knowledge and skills from your academic studies to the internship?
12. Did you have opportunities to take the initiative beyond the basic requirements of the internship?
13. Did you gain new knowledge and/or skills during my internship?
14. Do you feel you have improved your ability to work with others?
15. Did you gain a better sense of your strengths and weaknesses?
16. Do you feel that your college learning experience was enriched by the internship?
17. Do you have a clearer sense of your career goals following the internship?
18. Do you feel that the internship experience strengthened your employment opportunities?
19. Did the internship made you more aware of social issues or community problems?
20. Do you feel that your internship work contributed to an important cause?

### **III. Satisfaction and Summary questions**

21. Overall, how satisfied are you about your internship experience?  
Highly satisfied \_\_\_ Satisfied \_\_\_ Not satisfied \_\_\_
22. Would you recommend the organization you interned with to other students?  
Highly recommend \_\_\_ Recommend \_\_\_ Not recommend \_\_\_
23. Would you recommend the internship program you were enrolled in to other students?  
Highly recommend \_\_\_ Recommend \_\_\_ Not recommend \_\_\_
24. Were you offered a part-time or full-time position in the organization you interned with following your internship?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_