

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM:
UNVEILING LIBERAL ARTS STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNSHIPS**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study investigates the perceptions of internships by seven students enrolled in a liberal arts program at an urban four-year R1 research institution; the study aims to understand why these students elected to participate in internships for academic credit when they are not required—moreover, it explores how characteristics of the internships, such as payment or lack thereof, influence their overall perceptions of the internship experiences and value. This study uses Dewey and Kolb’s theoretical frameworks to emphasize the importance of concrete, hands-on approaches to pragmatic, real-world experiences. As we strive to develop an understanding of student’s internship experiences and their role in prepping them for future careers, we must comprehend how these experiences add value to students beyond the classroom.

Purposive sampling in a case study methodology, including semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions, was used to dig into each participant’s perceptions of internships. Participants were asked why they elected to complete their internship for academic credit, what motivated them to do an internship, and their overall perceptions of internships, among other topics. The emerging themes were career clarification through internships, career development, and career-related outcomes. Several sub-themes emerged from the interviews, including exploring career interests and career paths, navigating uncertainty around career choices, learning and personal growth, career planning, skills development, and personal development. The participants were also asked whether they think internships should be mandatory for all students; the general census was yes, and they should be incorporated into the curriculum of the institution.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my biological father, McNeil O'Brian Forde. This degree was unfathomable without you and the fact that you are unable to see it makes it difficult. But this is for us, dad.

McNeil O'Brian Forde

September 15, 1961- October 16, 2001

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Is going to college worth it? The shrinking job market, coupled with the rising cost of attendance at higher education institutions, has a frightening effect on the outlook of employment for collegegoers (Balleisen & Chin, 2022; DiConti, 2004). According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSCRC] (2022), postsecondary enrollment among graduate and undergraduate students has decreased by 4.1% equaling roughly 685, 000 students not enrolling in college during the spring 2022 semester. With liberal arts, business, and healthcare being the most popular majors' college students select, the most significant declines were seen in those areas (Nietzel, 2022). Although there has been a nationwide decline in college enrollment, a liberal arts education still holds merit in producing students with the academic expertise to succeed in the twenty-first century working world (Balleisen & Chin, 2022). Attributes such as collaboration across diverse groups, versatility in communication skills, and leadership are highly sought by employers. Stross (2017) reports that a liberal arts curriculum has the capacity to equip students with these transferable career proficiencies that give their graduates a competitive advantage in the ever-changing career landscape.

Furthermore, student development in higher education institutions encompasses a holistic experience, including developing thinking, attitudes, and habits and acquiring knowledge and skills. These experiences, from activities within and beyond the classrooms to interactions with the campus community in formal and informal settings, play pivotal roles in shaping the learning journey (Bitew, 2016). Therefore, investing in a strong curriculum is vital in preparing students for the world beyond college. It provides

relevant and up-to-date knowledge, preparing them to thrive in their chosen fields. With an emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills, students can learn how to analyze complex situations and propose innovative solutions. Engaging in the practical application of knowledge through internships, research projects, and other experiential learning opportunities enables students to develop practical skills that are applicable and transferrable to real-world scenarios. Working through collaborative projects and indulging in teamwork opportunities cultivate effective communication and the ability to work harmoniously in diverse groups. Investment in professional development resources offered within the curriculum, such as career counseling and networking opportunities, can help students enhance their employability and successfully transition into the professional world. By integrating soft skills development and fostering global and cultural awareness, a strong curriculum prepares students holistically, ensuring they are well-prepared to make a positive impact in their future careers.

Experiential learning opportunities such as internships, study abroad, research and community engagement, and career readiness as focal points of liberal arts education validate the benefits of a liberal arts degree and how it prepares students for life after college (Stableton et al., 2020). Internships as an extension of experiential learning have increased over the last decades (Lierman et al., 2017), with seventy-five percent of postsecondary graduates completing at least one internship (Rothberg, 2015). As college enrollment across various disciplines, such as the liberal arts, continues to decline to keep up with higher education trends, investing in experiential learning opportunities and a strategic focus on career readiness across the liberal arts has emerged as a highly focused phenomenon.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE] (2019) defines *career readiness* as a demonstration of adequate competencies by graduates to adapt to the workplace. In addition, higher education institutions have recognized the importance of encouraging students to participate in experiential learning opportunities to gain adaptable skills outside the classroom that boosts their overall college experience while furthering their career aspirations (Binder et al., 2015). However, a significant challenge for faculty members is figuring out how to engage students in active learning. While many instructors utilize real-world examples to capture their students' attention while providing them with relevant material that engages them in critical thought, many have needed help cultivating an environment conducive to hands-on skill development and career readiness (Bradberry & De Maio, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Research suggests active learning through course content focusing on experiential learning is critical to providing liberal arts students a competitive advantage. Bradberry and De Maio (2019) define experiential learning as a student engagement pedagogy in high-yielding co-curricular environments. Experiential learning components include volunteering, leadership in a student organization, campus involvement, service learning, study abroad, internships, cooperative learning, student employment/work-study, and faculty-led research. Encouraging liberal arts students' participation in these activities can be crucial to their success during college and beyond. Furthermore, exposure to experiential learning opportunities such as internships allows students to experience outside the classroom, boosting their overall college experience while furthering their career aspirations (Binder et al., 2015).

The introduction of experiential learning in the course curriculum has successfully engaged students in active learning and hands-on training that extends beyond the classroom. Specifically, focus on advancing skillsets by directly applying in-classroom learning while increasing students' marketability for entry-level positions once they have completed college. In addition, experiential learning is necessary for liberal arts students since their area of interest is broader and can pose difficulty when teaching in a classroom setting. For instance, students learn the essential etiquette of adapting to a professional environment, being accountable for the quality of their work and actions and navigating those relevant interpersonal relationships with mentors and supervisors (Bradberry & De Maio, 2018).

These skills are attainable with hands-on experience that occurs outside the classroom. Exposure to such pragmatic skill development provides beneficial experiences for liberal arts students because it equips them with the transferrable skill set necessary to emerge and contribute to the ever-changing working world. They are explicitly refining their oral and written communication, using critical thinking, analytical, problem-solving, and applying knowledge learned to real-life scenarios. Additionally, they must provide liberal arts students with the confidence to advance their job search and embark on the professional working world upon graduation.

While institutions recognize the importance of prioritizing experiential learning to combat the complex dynamics of a liberal arts education, internships are not required within the Liberal Arts degree. However, many disciplines, such as business, require internships as supplemental to academic studies due to their relevance in boosting student credentials and marketability (Trosset et al., 2019). Internships are also viewed as High-

Impact Practices because they significantly contribute to student learning (American Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2013). In addition, NACE (2015) reported that seventy-three percent of employers seek college candidates with professional experience relevant to the job. In contrast, only twenty percent of employers hire college candidates with valuable work experience.

Consequently, college graduates who complete internships have an increased earning potential of fifteen percent because they exceeded their employers' expectations (Gault et al., 2010). Although many stated benefits exist for liberal arts students to complete experiential learning opportunities such as internships, not much literature covers student perceptions of these internship experiences and why students opt to complete them for academic credit—considering that most Liberal Arts internships are unpaid. Therefore, this study will focus on liberal arts students' motivation to complete internships for academic credit and their perceptions of the internship experience since internships are not a mandatory requirement of their academic curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study is John Dewey's 1938 model of learning and David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. These models have been the pinnacle of advancing experiential learning within academics as they set the groundwork for why experience is essential to learning.

John Dewey's learning model focuses primarily on learning and how it relates to an individual's experience and action (Kolb, 1984). Dewey believed that all knowledge occurs within the social environment, as our thinking and actions are influenced by those around us. The model consists of knowledge as the first component- this knowledge is

acquired by the learner from an educator. The learner comprehends the information the educator shares, and learning is the outcome of this experience; it is a continuous process that a learner engages in to advance their knowledge (Roberts, 2003).

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory consists of eight stages- four learning cycles and four learning styles. Kolb believes it is essential to know an individual's learning style so that teaching can be tailored to maximize learning, primarily since most learners use multiple learning styles to comprehend information. Chapter 2 of this paper will discuss these frameworks in further detail. Utilizing the theoretical models from Kolb and Dewey, this study hopes to illustrate the importance of concrete, hands-on approaches to pragmatic, real-world experiences.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines how students in a liberal arts major at a liberal arts college within an urban four-year R1 research institution perceive their internship experiences. Explicitly focusing on why students elect to complete internships for academic credit when optional for students in all majors, this study will also explore whether specific internship characteristics impact their perceptions of the overall experience. For example, does payment vs. non-payment affect a student's perception of the internship experience, or whether payment affects the value of the overall experience gained for students?

Research shows that a liberal arts curriculum that infuses experiential learning opportunities enhances the college experience for students (DiConti, 2004). Although the push towards experiential learning is new, learning through experience has existed for centuries. Dewey (1887) theorized that education and experience must be a continuum of each other. Many scholars, such as Kolb and Kolb (2005), have also described

experiential learning as a comprehensive process of incorporating knowledge learned with real-world experience. However, further research is needed on why many institutions have yet to infuse internships as a requirement in the academic curriculum.

Internships within the liberal arts are not mandatory for students. However, specific majors have incorporated them as an elective fulfillment, whereas others have not. Equally important, internships are perceived to impact career development and readiness for college students positively. In addition, students who have completed one or more internships have higher marketability and attractiveness as applicants to job recruiters (Binder et al., 2015). Therefore, inquiring about the benefits of internships by students who choose to complete them, is a question of concern, especially with the benefits they bring to the liberal arts curriculum.

Research Questions

The following research questions are designed to explore the perceptions of the internship experience. The host research location focuses primarily on four pillars of experiential learning: internships, study abroad, research and community engagements. While none of these pillars are required, students are strongly encouraged to engage in them. Although, not required, several majors within the Liberal Arts offer internship courses for students who elect to complete them for academic credit. Internships have widely known benefits for those who choose to complete them. At the same time, a gap exists in understanding why internships are not universally required for all liberal arts majors. This study investigates the perceived benefits of internship experience for students who complete them although they are not required. There are several angles to exploring the topic of internships. This study explores the following research questions:

1. What motivates liberal arts students to elect to complete an internship for credit?
2. What are their perceptions of the internship experience?

Definition of Terms

Liberal Arts College

A liberal arts college is a four-year undergraduate institution that takes a broader approach to education by focusing on the arts, sciences, humanities, and social sciences. Instead of preparing students for a specific career, such as business or computer science, a liberal arts curriculum encourages them to develop an appreciation for many subjects and practice their critical thinking skills. As such, students can pursue many careers after graduating. From its early creation, liberal arts colleges focused on subjects that stimulated the mind, like arithmetic, geometry, grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Most liberal arts colleges are:

- **Small:** have less than 5,000 students.
- **Classroom interaction:** Classes are small and foster open discussion and spirited student-teacher interaction.
- **Focus on undergraduates:** Liberal arts colleges focus only on undergraduate degrees.
- **Emphasis on teaching:** Professors at liberal arts colleges focus on teaching first and research second (Coursera, 2022).

Liberal Arts Education

Princeton University describes a liberal arts education as offering a comprehensive intellectual grounding in humanistic inquiry. It allows members to explore issues, ideas, and methods across the humanities, the arts, and the natural and

social sciences. Individuals who pursue a liberal arts education will be equipped to read critically, write cogently and think broadly. With these skills, the individual will elevate their conversations in the classroom while strengthening their social and cultural analysis. Furthermore, they will cultivate the necessary tools to navigate the world's most complex issues (Princeton, n.d.).

Liberal Arts Degree

A liberal arts degree allows a broader focus on connecting the subject areas with the study. A liberal arts degree allows students to focus on expanding their intellectual curiosity through their broad coursework. Students who pursue a liberal arts degree will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree (Coursera, 2022).

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning emerged from the works of John Dewey, an educational theorist and philosopher. Dewey (1887) theorized that education and experience must be a continuum. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), experiential learning is various opportunities that enrich a student's college education. Experiential learning components include volunteering, leadership in a student organization, campus involvement, service learning, study abroad, internships, cooperative education, student employment/work-study, and faculty-led research.

Internships

NACE defines internships as experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skill development in a professional setting. Furthermore, internships allow students to gain valuable applied experience, make connections in professional fields they are considering for potential

career paths, and provide employers with the opportunity to guide and evaluate future talent (NACE, 2011).

There are four characteristics of an internship (a) students work a specific number of hours, (b) students can work for free or be paid for their internship, (c) students can earn credit for their internship, and (d) students are supervised by a corporate counterpart and a faculty or staff member from their host institution (DiLorenzo-Aiss & Mathisen, 1996; Gault et al., 2016).

Significance of the study

Understanding student perceptions of the internship experience is essential for measuring the impact internships have on professional career outcomes for liberal arts students. Specifically, most internships that liberal arts students complete are in the nonprofit sector and are unpaid. While some internship opportunities are paid, they are exceedingly rare. In addition, many students attend college full-time while working part-time or full-time. Therefore, students might need to forgo some of their work hours to fulfill the requirements of an internship, thus contributing to a loss of wages and a financial burden or hardship. To combat financial hardships, the liberal arts college created donor-funded scholarships to bridge the gap between forgoing the necessary hands-on experience of an internship and its academic merit for working a part-time or full-time job to earn wages to pay for student expenses.

Therefore, with a deeper understanding of student perceptions of the benefits of internships, the researcher can make predictions to the institution about participants thoughts on internships. In addition, it will provide concrete evidence of internship impacts on career outcomes, thus prompting the advocacy of internships across all liberal

arts disciplines. Moreover, to build a case for more stipend/scholarship opportunities so students are not forced to choose between earning wages to support themselves in college and completing a required or non-required internship in their field of interest that could substantially benefit their future.

The proposed study examines student perspectives and motivation, perceived benefits, and barriers to completing internships for academic credit and non-credit attainment. The study offers a unique perspective on how undergraduate students in a liberal arts college perceive their internship experience and the motivation behind completing internships. It is often difficult to describe the benefits of a liberal arts education, especially with the changing demands of the working environment. Experiential learning offers value and can contribute to overall learning. It combines in-classroom learning with hands-on application in a professional setting. These applied learning opportunities enrich the college experience while successfully preparing students to learn transferable skills across disciplines.

Chapter Summary

This chapter establishes the introduction, statement of the problem, theoretical framework, the study's purpose, research questions, and significance. In addition, it establishes a brief overview of the proposed methodology, potential study limitations, and the definition of critical terms. This chapter introduces the topic and raises awareness about its significance. Internship motivation for liberal arts students is a phenomenon that has yet to be studied. Many liberal arts students choose to complete internships despite it not being a mandatory requirement as part of the academic curriculum. Therefore, exploring the motivation for students to complete internships regardless of their

requirements is grounds for research. This study aims to inform future students about the benefits of completing an internship despite being optional and inform future policy and practice at the institution around the promotion of internships.

The next chapter of this study provides an extensive overview of the literature on internships. It explains the theoretical models that will be employed in guiding this research and helping understand the data collected and analyzed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation explores liberal arts students' motivations to complete internships and their perceptions of the experience. While some liberal arts programs require the completion of an internship as part of the academic curriculum, others do not. Additionally, many liberal arts internships exist in the social impact and nonprofit sector; thus, many are unpaid or unfunded. This research will utilize the theory of academic motivation as a baseline for guiding this study, therefore investigating the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive students to complete internships, given that they are not always required for their program. A deep dive into student motivations is essential to understanding students' perspectives on the importance of internships and their motivators for completing them. This literature review provides the rationale for this research through the following sections:

1. History and significance of experiential learning, explicitly addressing internships,
2. Value of internships,
3. Paid vs. unpaid internships,
4. Internships for academic credit,
5. Student outcomes.

Section I: History and Significance of Experiential Learning

The term experiential learning was first introduced in the late 20th century. This term's origins were conceived to differentiate learning and experience related to education (Seaman et al., 2017). Scholars such as Kolb and Dewey rose to prominence

for their contribution to literature with Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Dewey's Model of Learning. Scholars have posited that experiential learning came about as a direct effect of the institutionalized era. During this era, Dewey's acclaim to fame resulted from his focus on *experience* and how segregation adversely affected children (Seaman et al., 2017). Experiential learning primarily began because educators sought to incorporate practical skills so students could apply what they were learning through their coursework to real-world situations (Oxley & Ilea, 2015). From inception, its goal was to engage students in establishing new knowledge that would impact their worldview by participating in significant life experiences. The experiences meant extending the classroom, such as traveling abroad, service learning, or internships by participating in collaborative projects with large-scale impacts within an organization. Experiential learning encouraged skill building through complex, coordinated activities that allowed students to think critically and analytically while problem-solving. Furthermore, experiential learning is considered a “high impact” instructional strategy because learning occurs when students can apply knowledge to practical scenarios where they can find the relevance of meaning for what they have been learning in the classroom.

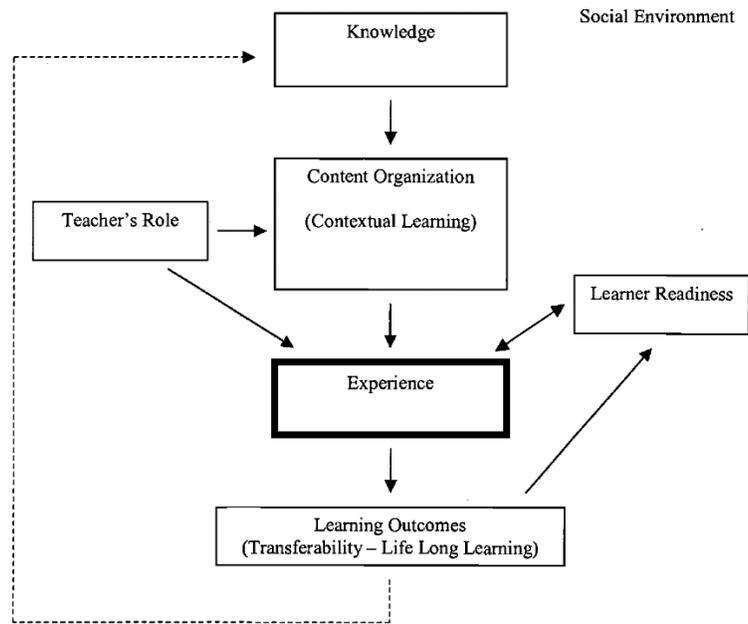
Gandhi (2023) writes that experiential learning holds significant importance due to its capacity to captivate, motivate, and challenge students in meaningful ways, thus becoming a driving force in revolutionizing education and preparing students for success in the 21st century. They think that by incorporating experiential learning methods, educational institutions create dynamic, immersive, and interactive learning experiences, empowering students to explore, experiment, and make discoveries. These experiences encompass various activities, such as engaging in research labs, exploring career fields

through internships, participating in real-world, hands-on initiatives, and contributing to community service projects. Through these real-world encounters, experiential learning enables students to cultivate their knowledge, skills, character, and personal growth. Thus, pushing the boundaries of a traditional classroom, students are no longer confined to one way of learning. Institutions now embrace this powerful approach that brings the curriculum to life through real-world application and involvement.

Theoretical Framework

Dewey's (1938) learning model is the foundation of experiential learning. It focuses on how learning translates an individual's impulses, feelings, and desires of concrete experiences into higher-order purposeful action (Kolb, 1984). Dewey's model posits that all knowledge occurs in a social environment. Within the social environment, knowledge is the first component shared by the educator, who turns it into comprehensible content for learners to understand. The educator then shares this knowledge with students, which translates to their competence in understanding the content. Lastly, learning is the overall outcome of this experience, and depending on the learner's readiness and knowledge, the process can begin again (Roberts, 2003). Figure 1 is a visual representation of Dewey's model of experiential learning as seen below.

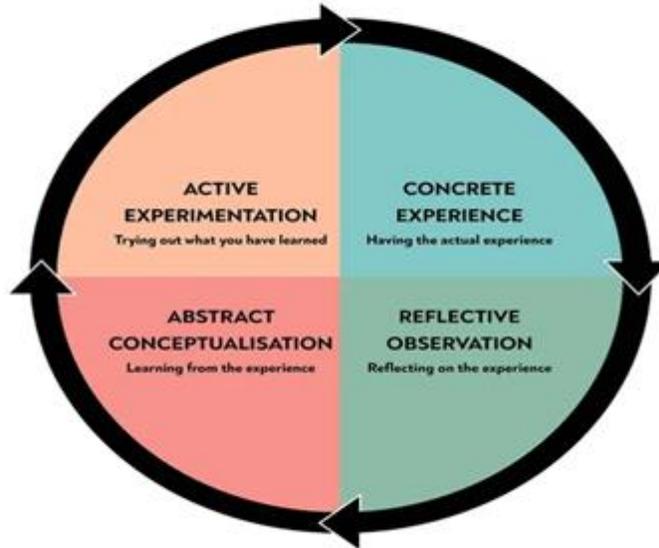
Figure 1. Dewey's Model of Experiential Learning



On the other hand, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory comprises eight stages, four stages of the cycle of learning, and four learning styles. The four cycles include *Concrete Experience*, *Reflective Observation of the New Experience*, *Abstract conceptualization*, and *active experimentation*, as depicted in the image below. In each stage of Kolb's model, a learner encounters an experience. For example, the learner might initially encounter a new or reinterpreted concept and must process this information. This is done in the *reflective observation* stage. After reflecting on the new information, the learner moves into the *abstract conceptualization* stage to understand what they have learned through new thoughts and ideas. The learner then moves into the final stage, *active experimentation*. During this stage, the learner experiments with the new concepts they have learned by applying them to the world. Kolb's theory focuses on the internal cognitive processes of the learner. He believed effective learning only occurs

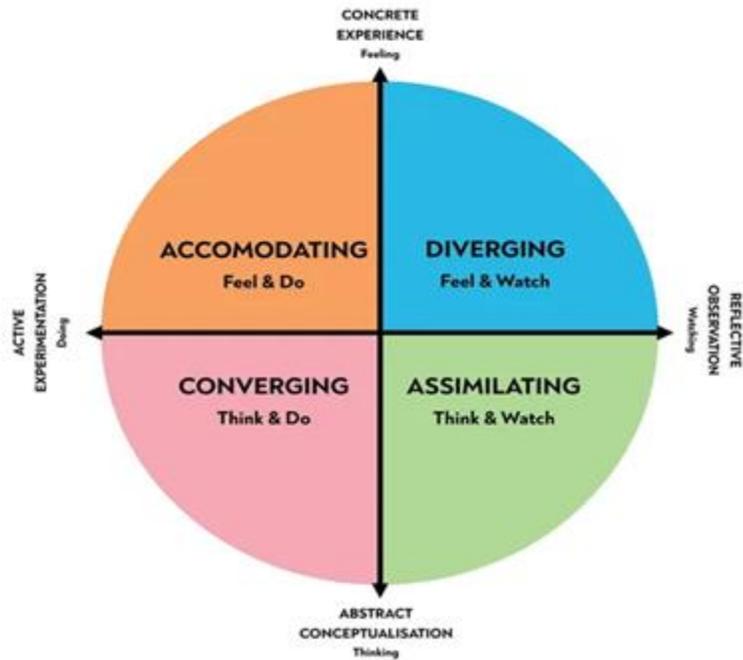
when individuals advance through all four stages (McLeod, 2017). Figure 2 as displayed below is a visual representation of Kolb's learning model.

Figure 2. Kolb's Learning Model



Kolb believed it is essential to know an individual's learning style so that teaching is tailored to maximize learning significantly since learners benefit from multiple stimuli. The four learning styles include *accommodating*, *diverging*, *converging*, and *assimilating*. Figure 3 as depicted below is a visual representation of Kolb's learning styles.

Figure 3. Kolb's Learning Styles



This model was created to empower educators to evaluate whether traditional learning styles provide the best opportunities to promote learning. Specifically, this framework assesses if this model is the best way to engage students in learning in a manner understandable to them and maximizes their potential to be successful outside of the classroom (McLeod, 2017).

Both Dewey's learning model and Kolb's experiential learning theory contribute to the intellectual framework of experiential learning. Both theorists contend that traditional classrooms offer valuable experiences, but more is needed to nurture a student's growth and potential fully. According to their beliefs, coupling education with experiences tailored to the student's goals fosters a profound comprehension of the purpose behind learning and its relevance to the world beyond the classroom. By

grasping the significance of their educational journey, students can wholeheartedly immerse themselves in the learning process (Oxley & Ilea, 2015).

Furthermore, instruction must transcend beyond captivating lectures and demanding tests for transformative learning to occur. Students need to engage in practical activities that allow them to connect on a deeper, more personal level than what traditional pedagogy offers. This experiential approach enhances understanding and cultivates a transformative learning experience, where knowledge is internalized and applied in meaningful ways.

Experiential Learning and Liberal Arts

Historically, liberal arts degree programs in colleges and universities have primarily focused on developing students' intellectual grounding and humanistic inquiry skills. However, they still need to gain the component of real-world knowledge application and skill development to solve problems. While many non-liberal arts disciplines do not award degrees without some field experience, liberal arts continue to fall behind in requiring experiential learning as a part of their curriculum (DiConti, 2004). Conversely, the demanding knowledge-based economy prompted liberal arts programs to encourage students to engage in experiential learning that expands beyond the classroom. This prompted the rise in internship completion across liberal arts colleges.

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), internship completion in the United States has increased over the past few decades (Lierman et al., 2017). This is a direct result of the 2008 financial crisis. Institutions have fortified their stance on the importance of internships for undergraduate students to obtain

a successful career, mainly focusing on incorporating quality internship experiences into the educational and academic curriculum. Therefore, students entering an institution of higher education expect it to offer some guidance or preparation for employment. The Liberal Arts have continuously worked towards expanding the in-classroom academic curricula with hands-on experience outside the classroom, especially as the value of a humanities education has been challenged by both students and employers (Stableton, 2020).

In a world where the demands for employment are ever-changing, liberal arts institutions are tasked with quantifying the benefits of a liberal arts degree while preparing students for the workforce landscape that awaits them. Evidence shows growing concerns about the under-preparation of students who need more true reflection and suitable preparation to emerge into the workforce because of the lack of out-of-classroom experience that allows them to develop their critical thinking skills (Suarez et al., 2020). A faculty-led study of a summer experiential learning opportunity to explore the benefits of incorporating experiential learning into the liberal arts academic curriculum found that students are better equipped to integrate knowledge and experience to solve problems after completing an experiential learning opportunity (Gaia, 2015). These out-of-classroom experiences are transformative for students because they can understand how the world extends beyond the classroom. Students also become ambassadors of these experiences and encourage others to engage with these opportunities (Gaia, 2015). This case study highlights the importance of students learning to think critically, utilize diverse perspectives for problem-solving, and collaborate with

individuals from different backgrounds while combining information from independent sources to make informed decisions. (Suarez et al., 2015).

Career Readiness in the Liberal Arts

Stableton and colleagues (2020) argue that the core of a Liberal Arts education is rooted in an individual's desire to be socially responsible while earning practical, transferable skills and allowing them to solve the world's problems. Because the liberal arts offer an interdisciplinary curriculum, it encourages students to explore the broader aspects of education, culture, science, and society, which expands their minds and allows them to evolve into socially responsible changemakers. Although liberal arts graduates are high-yield changemakers who analytically and critically work toward generating solutions to complex problems, many critics question the value of a liberal arts education (DuRose & Stableton, 2016). In addition, misconceptions by students and stakeholders make it difficult to advocate for the benefits of liberal arts. DuRose and Stableton (2016) suggest that professionals and faculty better promote the benefits of a liberal arts education so that students and stakeholders understand what it entails.

To address the critics of the liberal arts, organizations such as the AAC&U (American Colleges and Universities) have taken a stance by publishing articles such as "How Liberal Arts and Science Majors Fare in Employment" (Humphreys & Kelly, 2014) and "It Takes More Than A Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success" (Hart et al., 2013). Findings from both studies identify many significant benefits of a liberal arts education, including career success, including positive contributions from liberal arts students to the overall economy and society (Simon et al., 2014).

Therefore, liberal arts schools and colleges use as career readiness guidelines, the results of the National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE] (2017) survey on "the key attributes employers seek on students' resumes." Some of these attributes include problem-solving skills, the ability to work as part of a team, written communication, leadership, and work ethic (NACE, 2017) to highlight that most of these sought-after skills are already cultivated within a liberal arts degree program (Simon et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the focus on career readiness by liberal arts institutions was designed to help prepare students to comprehend how the intersection of the humanities, arts, and sciences inform, enrich, and affect one another. While also helping to validate how the intellectual capacity, practical skillset, analytical ability, well-rounded mindset, and socially responsible nature of liberal arts programs creates a holistic individual fully equipped and prepared for the rigorous tasks that await them. Hence, career readiness as a core requirement in the liberal arts has been gaining traction in recent years. Thus, suggesting a liberal arts curriculum has merit in its ability to equip students with transferable career proficiencies that offer their graduates a competitive advantage in the changing career landscape (Stross, 2017).

The National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE] (2019) defines *career readiness* as a demonstration of adequate competencies by graduates to adapt to the workplace environment. According to NACE (2019), there are eight career readiness competencies: oral and written communication; critical thinking and problem-solving; collaboration and teamwork; work ethic and professionalism; intercultural and global fluency; digital technology; career management, and leadership. NACE believes

these critical attributes are essential for boosting employability for graduates of the Liberal Arts. A value of internships is the provision of these critical skills.

Section II: Value of Internships

The Benefits of Internships

Completing internships has many touted benefits for students, higher education institutions, and employers. Internships add value to the overall academic experience and increase experience and employability for those entering the workforce. In addition, internships help improve an institution's attractiveness to potential students. Over the past few decades, the number of students completing internships has increased tremendously, with one out of thirty-six graduates completing an internship during the 1980s (Coco, 2000), and now roughly seventy-five percent of postsecondary students complete at least one internship by graduation (Rothberg, 2015). This means that students, employers, and postsecondary educational institutions agree that there are several benefits of completing an internship before graduation. Internships help bridge the gap between higher education institutions and the labor industry and the transition from the classroom to the labor market for students (Sanahuja et al., 2015).

In a systematic review of the "Effects of Business Internships on Students, Employers, and Higher Education Institutions," Sanahuja Velez and Giner (2015) found that internships allowed students to improve their skills while raising their chances of employability post-graduation. These students reported higher wages and better job satisfaction. For employers, the benefits included resourceful and inexpensive qualified candidates, reduced cost of recruitment, increased partnerships with institutions, and an implosion of new talent and ideas. For institutions, the benefits included increased

reputation and attractability, added benefits to the academic curriculum, and improved partnerships with the labor industry (Sanahuja et al., 2015). Liberal arts programs primarily emphasize internship opportunities as a way for students to earn job-specific skills that allow them to enhance their academic learning. By acquiring these skills, students make it easier for themselves to find employment post-graduation. Several studies indicate that employers value experience, specifically job-specific skills, over academic credentials (Trosset et al., 2019). According to the Chronicle of Higher Education and NPR's Marketplace (2012), internships were a powerful credential for graduates to showcase on their resumes.

Student Benefits of Internships

Internships have been touted as valuable for enhancing the overall undergraduate experience for students and their employability post-graduation. Colleges and universities are advancing the agenda for the widespread adoption of internships as a mandatory requirement for graduation (Hora et al., 2019). Research has shown that internships help bridge the gap for students entering the labor market by providing them with hands-on experience to apply their classroom knowledge (Sanahuja et al., 2015). While higher education, employers, and scholars have documented the value of internships, not much research has been conducted on students' perceptions and conceptualization of the internship experience. This gap prompts an inquiry into how students make meaning of their internship experience and how these experiences benefit their employability afterward. A student inquiry will also shed light on a topic that has been primarily employer-centered (Higdon, 2016; Tymon, 2013) and anecdotal, thus needing more student insight. College is a critical period for student development; therefore,

documenting how students make meaning of internships is vital to understanding their perceived value and how it translates into career aspirations and employability.

Additionally, it is equally important to investigate how negative internship experiences, such as worker exploitation, could harm students' aspirations and create inequity in career exploration.

Hora and colleagues (2019) drew data from a mixed-method, longitudinal study of internships at three postsecondary institutions, including:

1. A predominantly White Institution (PWI) with 4,168 students,
2. A technical college with 20,801 students, and
3. A historically Black College or University (HBCU) with 2,038 students.

Students ranged from the junior and senior classes for the first and third institutions and from the second half of their degree program at the second institution. This sampling method ensured that all student participants had completed an internship.

The data were collected from focus groups and an online survey, allowing students to self-select participation in the study. Incentives were \$5 for survey completion and \$20 for focus group participation. The survey group included 3,385 participants and the focus group included 57 participants. Each focus group contained two to four participants, with some no-shows resulting in 7 one-on-one interviews. Within the focus groups, students were asked to complete a free-list exercise prompting them to identify words or phrases relating to the word internship. The researchers used a written free list exercise instead of a verbal one to decrease group influence. Students were then prompted to further expand on the definition of the first term on their free list. After this discussion, students were asked a series of open-ended questions. Some questions

included "motivation for pursuing an internship and the nature of the work during their internship." Students who did not complete an internship were asked about "barriers to pursuing an internship opportunity and if they were concerned for their future career without an internship experience."

The results of this study were that students most often related an internship with "learning"- reported by roughly 66.7% of participants, "experience" was second with 61.4%, "advancement" was third with 43.9%, and lastly was "connections" which 40.4% reported as the definition of an internship. After disaggregation of the data, students who took an internship frequently used the terms "learning" (73.5%), "exploration" (58.5%), and "experience" (52.9%). Those students who had not completed an internship used terms like "experience" (73.9%), "learning" (56.5%), "unpaid" (43.5%), and "advancement" (43.5%) when describing internships.

At a time when colleges and universities must show the extent of employability of their students, access to internships helps to facilitate this transition from college into the working world. However, Hora and colleagues (2019) argue the flawed system of employability and internships because it ignores students' voices from whom the internship experience should benefit the most. Additionally, they argue that while some research on student opinions exists, there need to be more student voices that speak to the phenomenon of internships and their benefits. Often, student perspectives are overshadowed by the perceived dominant benefit employers and administrators have brought students to believe, specifically since internships are marketed as essential for increasing employability.

Employer's Perceptions of Internships

The employment market is a significant driver of internship completion. A study by the Chronicle of Higher Education and American Public Media Marketplace found that employers value experience, especially that earned from internships and other part-time employment during college, over academic credentials such as college major and GPA (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2012). Across industries such as science, technology, retail, services, media, and communication, experience is a higher valued consideration in hiring recent graduates (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2012). The Chronicle of Higher Education survey targeted 50 000 employers who work with Experience.com and recruit recent college graduates. Overall, internships were reported as the most significant credential for recent graduates, specifically for students entering the media/communication fields. The weighted results showed that a college major was an essential credential to employers. However, employers place a higher value on internships during college when considering recent graduates for a position.

Rothschild and Rothschild (2020) states that employers favor recent graduates who complete internships while earning academic credit. These students are regarded as passionate about the internship experience. They are touted as hard workers because of the accountability aspect of the internship coupled with the academic rigor of taking academic credit and its potential effect on their GPA (Rothschild & Rothschild, 2020; Saltikoff et al., 2017). Additionally, employers reported that recent graduates who reported completing internships took precedence over graduates with pristine academic performances. While there was not much variability in the preference for paid vs. unpaid

internships, employers seemed to regard the overall internship experience as a highly favorable decision in hiring students (The Chronicle of higher education, 2012).

Employers are also utilizing internships to recruit and gain new talent. Many can capitalize on new talent for low or no cost (Durrant, 2013). Interns are a good source of help for organizations, especially during busy periods when they can hire interns for short periods. The employer and student benefit from this short-term agreement where employers gain part-time help without full-time expenses (Maskookie et al., 1998; Stiglitz, 1975), and students gain training in a field of their career interest (Zopiatis, 2007).

Institutional Benefits of Internships

Higher education institutions aim to ensure their students are hired post-graduation (Santiago, 2009). Earlier, institutions focused on teaching students foundational and theoretical knowledge. However, modern-day requirements of higher education institutions are to ensure that students possess theoretical and foundational knowledge and practical knowledge and skills to back up their education (Chen et al., 2011; Coco, 2020). Therefore, many higher education institutions have incorporated internship programs to allow students to gain real-world experience through classroom knowledge application (Coco, 2000), which improves their chances of gaining employment after graduation.

Additionally, having access to a wide array of internship opportunities increases institutions' connections with the labor industry. It assures parents that their children will have access to opportunities, thus increasing their potential to be hired after graduation. This improves the institution's reputation and assists recruitment efforts (Weible, 2009).

The more connections to well-sought-after industry employers, the more attractive an institution is to students and their parents (Weible, 2009). There are several wins for an institution with accessible internships for its students. From recruitment efforts to community building and financial benefits, institutions can benefit from creating internship programs in their academic curriculums. Moreover, there is much to gain from all parties involved, especially with favorable results of skill attainment, talent pool development, and an overall improved academic experience.

Weible (2009) conducted a qualitative study to measure if universities are reaping the available benefits internship programs offer to examine the economic development, recruiting, and reputation. The research questions included "Do internships increase the number of students hired by new or small businesses?" "Does internship placement lead to increased economic development?" "Are graduates from colleges and universities with internship programs hired sooner, at higher salaries, by better organizations, into better positions?" "Is the reputation of the institution affected by its internship programs?" A total of 619 schools were included in the sample. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) selected participants from a national database. An email was sent to deans requesting their school's participation in an online survey. Respondents were prompted to have the individual most knowledgeable about the internship program benefits to the institution respond to the survey.

Forty-three respondents were deans, twenty-four were faculty members, and thirty-four percent were other staff members. Demographic information was collected from the Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPED) database. The questionnaire used a 6-point Likert-type scale with 0 (never to 5

(always); some open-ended questions were also asked. Ninety-five percent of the participating schools offered internships. The results showed that "34% of respondents reported that internships inspired their students to open new businesses", "88% reported stronger connections to the community because of internship programs", and 71% reported an increase in their students being hired by small businesses (Weible, 2009). Additional results showed that 82% of respondents reported students prioritizing schools with internship programs when considering enrollment in college, and 82% reported the reputation being positively affected by its internship offerings. These results show that institutions are affected by their internship activities.

Section III: Paid versus Unpaid Internships

Unpaid internships

Access to high-quality experiential learning opportunities such as internships has become integral to a college education (NACE, 2017). Internships are touted as having certain benefits for student outcomes. Exposure to experiential learning opportunities improves graduation rates and student retention and increases students' overall learning and development. Additionally, roughly eighty-four percent of collegegoers find importance in completing an internship before graduation (Reid, 2015). However, while the value of internships is highly entrenched in the literature across colleges and universities, a significant concern centers around unpaid internships and their value for undergraduate students. Many argue that there is value in completing internships, whether paid or unpaid. Westerberg and Wickersham (2011) argue that internships are vital partnerships between the student, their internship site, and their institutions. They also argue that internships are irreplaceable, especially in the liberal arts curriculum,

because it allows students to expand their learning beyond the classroom with hands-on training through community connection while strengthening the relationship between faculty and students.

Colleges and universities alike tout paid or unpaid internships as an extension of the classroom where students earn experiences that are difficult to teach in a traditional instructional setting. However, this unfortunate legitimizing of the importance of internship experiences by colleges and universities has abetted and encouraged the practice of students working for free (McDermott, 2013). Furthermore, with institutions cosigning academic credits as a replacement for compensation, many for-profit organizations have taken advantage of targeting unpaid interns with the promise of earning academic credit.

Thus, solidifying institutions' role in the unfair practice of encouraging organizations to hire unpaid student interns (McDermott, 2013). While merit exists in how unpaid internships benefit students, some research suggests that unpaid internships pose further hardships, especially for low-income college students. For example, college students from lower socioeconomic status cannot afford to lose wages to participate in an unpaid internship (Westerberg & Wickersham, 2011).

Rothschild and Rothschild (2020) reported that unpaid internships cause issues such as social mobility and accessibility for low-income students. The researchers underscore how unpaid internship programs increase wealth disparities between low-income and affluent students—highlighting affluent students' access to disposable resources such as capital to fund their ability to work for no compensation. Additionally, access to opportunities that create the most significant return will likely be offered to

wealthier students than their lower-income counterparts. Fink (2013) noted that wealthier students had more access to internships at larger organizations that created more opportunities for them, whereas low-income students interned at smaller nonprofit organizations with access to less life-altering opportunities.

Capek and colleagues (2017) conducted a study that measured whether payment affected a student's ability to take an internship and what concessions a student makes when taking on an unpaid internship found that when asked: "what is most important to you in an internship." Forty percent of participants ($n=52$) sought internships to "help them decide what they want to do in the future." Twenty-nine percent of students reported "wanting to network with professionals in my area of interest." Lastly, thirty-eight percent of participants listed internships "as a source of financial income." The study found that students value an internship experience and the education they learn from it, whether paid or unpaid. While many students choose to participate in a quality internship experience, many reported needing a part-time job to finance themselves when completing an unpaid internship (Capek et al., 2017). However, research suggests that organizations should consider paying interns because students are placed in challenging positions that alter their overall experience and education. This contributes to their financial instability by forcing students to acquire more significant debts or commit to additional obligations (Capek et al., 2017).

Adverse Effects of Unpaid Internships

Unpaid internships date back to the passing of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938. This act was passed to combat workers' injustices during the Great Depression. While the primary benefit of this law was to ensure a minimum standard of

living that prioritized well-being, health, and efficiency, it brought about the legitimacy of unpaid internships (Durrant, 2013). The rise of unpaid internships directly resulted from the recession and is especially prevalent in fields where experience is critical for the job. Moreover, small businesses, nonprofits, and government are the primary beneficiaries of unpaid interns because they lack hiring resources, thus benefiting from saving money by hiring students to intern (Durrant, 2013).

Durrant (2013) highlights the adverse effects of unpaid internships on students. They noted the detrimental effects of unpaid internships, including long-term financial hardship, discrimination among social classes based on socioeconomic status, high rates of unemployment, and exposure to workplace harassment because of the unprotected status of interns. While there are many obvious financial hardships of unpaid internships, it is beneficial to highlight the opportunity cost of accepting an unpaid internship. The opportunity cost of giving up a service job for an unpaid internship can set a student back financially because the student has given up the opportunity to earn a wage to participate in an unpaid internship.

Durrant (2013) also stated that unpaid internships discriminate against those from lower socioeconomic status, thus favoring wealthier students. Many wealthier students have their parents' financial support. At the same time, they can take time off to complete an unpaid internship. However, those students who do not have family financial support might deter from participating in an unpaid internship because they need to seek paid opportunities to help fund their education and life. Thus, there are more disincentives to participate in internship opportunities if paid. Therefore, unpaid internships are unfavorably geared toward wealthy students. Through these unpaid internships, they can

afford to forego a paid opportunity to gain experience and access to organizations. The backlash of this adverse effect is that it limits competitiveness in the labor market because of the lack of diversity in interns who move into the workforce as professionals.

Durrant (2013) proclaims that unpaid internships will eventually lead to higher unemployment rates because employers might cut costs by hiring unpaid interns instead of committing to full-time employees, thus having to provide fringe benefits. Employers cutting costs can negatively affect the economy and displace full-time employees. Employers can capitalize on hiring more unpaid interns because of their desire to earn professional experience. Furthermore, because unpaid internships target a specific set of students, there will always be a supply of students who fit this criterion and are willing to complete internships.

Lastly, Durrant proclaims that while there will always be a supply of students willing to work at unpaid internships to earn professional experience, the need for more protection offered to these students is a growing concern. Interns do not have the same rights and opportunities as full-time employees and, therefore, are not protected from unlawful discrimination and harassment within the workplace, exposing students to being exploited by their employers solely for the company's benefit. Not having protection in the workplace can leave students vulnerable to discrimination and cause them not to speak up about it, leaving students with an obscure view of their rights as an intern. To combat interns' exposure to exploitation, institutions must work to educate students about their rights as an intern and what constitutes unfair practices in the workplace, thus encouraging them to speak up and report their employers when exposed to exploitation (Durrant, 2013).

Scholarship Impact on Unpaid Internships

Because liberal arts students may anticipate a lifelong career rooted in the nonprofit, government, and social service sectors, access to scholarships is impactful for creating opportunities that assist students in their educational journey. As the college landscape changes, so do the student body population. For example, the college demographic now includes more adult learners, part-time students, commuter students, and remote learners. With this change in demographic, student responsibilities now vary drastically from what they were in the past. For example, more college students are working to support and put themselves through college (Durrant, 2013). Therefore, completing internships might be prioritized by only some students with these conflicting responsibilities, and some students need help to afford to forego paid employment for an unpaid internship. Scholarships and stipends are one way to combat this issue, and many institutions are working towards providing more scholarship opportunities to assist students with participating in internship opportunities.

For example, elite institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Swarthmore, and University of Pennsylvania have incorporated changes to assist students who take on unpaid internships. For example, they have increased the need-based financial aid offered to their students and opted to replace traditional loans with grants to offer supplemental support to socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Yagoda, 2008). Additionally, to combat the divide between wealthy and disadvantaged students' ability to participate in unpaid internships, institutions are starting to provide stipends to students who must take unpaid internships, thus creating more opportunities for disadvantaged students (Yagoda, 2008).

Paid Internships

While no database exists on internship availability in the United States, roughly 1.5 million internships are completed yearly, and almost half are unpaid (Rothschild & Rothschild, 2020; Reid, 2015). Paid internships are often positively correlated with full-time employment offers before graduation, but the lack of access to them creates inequity for those in the liberal arts (Lierman, 2017). In addition, studies found that paid internships are closely tied to developing professional skills (Crain, 2016; Capek et al., 2017). Many students pursuing a liberal arts degree anticipate a lifelong career in social services, government, and the nonprofit sector. According to Gardner (2011), they are the most likely to provide unpaid internships. Paramount to paid internships are the positive impacts it has on students' well-being, including setting them up for financial security and establishing good work habits. Beard and Morton (1999) found that paid interns reported higher satisfaction with their experience and a more significant commitment toward wanting to do an excellent job while having lower stress levels as compared to peers who do not complete internships (Beard & Morton, 1999).

Capek and colleagues (2017) conducted a study aimed at measuring whether payment affected a student's ability to take an internship and what concessions a student makes when taking on an unpaid internship. Student responses were classified into five categories that included the following:

- [1] I cannot take an unpaid internship.
- [2] If forced into taking an unpaid internship, it will be extremely challenging.
- [3] I would need a paid internship but will consider unpaid.
- [4] I can overcome the challenges of an unpaid internship.

[5] I can take an unpaid internship without financial challenges.

The results showed that roughly eighty-nine percent of participants ($n=52$) said: "they would need at least one additional part-time job to support themselves financially." In comparison, twelve percent reported, "not needing the monetary support of another job or had another source of income/scholarship to help them." While many students value their internship experience, several students need help taking an unpaid internship. These difficulties include finding other income streams to finance their cost of living, tuition for their education, and internship expenses such as transportation (Capek et al., 2017). However, paid internships yield significantly higher satisfaction with the experience, are more valuable, create mentorship opportunities, and advance student job pursuits (McHugh, 2017). Furthermore, paid internships positively correlate with a better overall experience (Burke & Carton, 2013). Paying student interns reduces their need to take on more obligations, including multiple jobs and working excessive hours in addition to their educational commitments (Capek et al., 2017).

Section IV: Internships for Academic Credit

Participation in internships offers a variety of educational outcomes for students. Studies have shown practical learning and development in students who have completed internships, especially related to a student's academic performance (Schambach & Dirks, 2002). In addition, research shows a positive correlation between internships and students' overall educational outcomes and thus offers academic credit to those who participate in internships (Zehr, 2016).

More than half of the available internships are unpaid. Some employers require students to earn academic credit while working at their internship site. Several

organizations need students to earn academic credit to participate in an internship experience, which allows them to validate their unpaid status (Lipka, 2010). Mandating students to enroll in internship-orientated courses that come with tuition fee to engage in unpaid experiential learning (Lipka, 2010). Furthermore, there are associations made by companies between obtaining academic credits as a replacement for providing payment. Job postings for internships state: “Applicant should be eligible for academic credit.” Educational institutions that evaluate internship experiences ensure that employers are responsible for delivering valuable internship prospects (Lipka, 2010).

According to Zehr (2016), several institutions require students to complete academic coursework for internship experience; however, studies have found that academic credits should only be awarded to students within professional majors that require them to complete practical work as part of their program training (Zehr, 2016; Wolf, 2008). Critics argue against awarding credit for academic work and not experience. Consequently, faculty members push back by arguing against the fairness of evaluation responsibilities being left up to external forces (Zehr, 2016; Ciofalo, 1989). While awarding credit for internship experience is often regarded as beneficial for a student's academic portfolio, critics argue that academic credit offers zero net gain for students (Zehr, 2016).

Hauck and colleagues (2000) examined the Construction Management Program at Colorado State University's implementation of a structured Internship Placement Program, students earned academic credit for their participation. Because the internship placement program was new, only some students participated, thus having a comparison group. The researchers measured [1] a comparison of GPA fluctuation, [2] student

performance in subsequent coursework, and student perceptions of the internship experience. The research question was, "*Does participation in the Phelps Internship Placement Program improve academic performance within the Colorado State University Construction Management curriculum compared to those who have not participated in the structured internship program?*" A pre-and post-internship survey was distributed.

The results showed that GPA at the pretest for internship participants was 2.9047 and 2.9827 for non-internship participants. At the post-test, the term GPA for internship participants was 2.9050 and 2.8285 for non-internship participants. The internship participants saw an increase in their GPA after their internship participation, whereas the non-participants saw a decrease in their GPA. The subsequent test results showed that the internship participants outperformed the non-internship participants in subsequent academic coursework. However, the authors found no differences (Hauck et al., 2000). While the authors of this study conclude that participation in internships will likely yield improvement in students' overall academic performance, they suggest further investigation into this topic as the results were not statistically significant.

Section V: Student Outcomes

Career-related Outcomes

Participation in internships has many benefits for students. For example, students are exposed to problems not commonly encountered in the classroom; they gain an enhanced understanding of the professional work environment; students learn practical skills that allow them to incorporate what they have learned in school (Hauck et al., 2000). In addition, students benefit from finding clarity in their occupational choices, the

potential to be permanently placed at their host internship site and building confidence in themselves and their abilities (Hauck et al., 2000). The literature suggests many student outcomes of internships. In particular, career-related outcomes are the highest-ranked outcomes. Most of the academic literature highlights the professional outcomes for student participants. For instance, students who participate in internships report earning higher salaries at the start and satisfaction in their chosen careers (Hoekstra, 2021).

While the literature does not specify whether these positive outcomes are associated with participation in a paid or unpaid internship, the overall results show that students who participated in any internship had greater odds of reducing the time it took them to find a job after they graduated because of the work-related skills they earned during their internship made them an attractive candidate to employers (Hoekstra, 2021). For example, a survey on liberal arts graduates found that unpaid interns had reduced time searching for employment after graduation compared to their peers who did not participate in an internship (Guarise & Kostenblatt, 2018).

Guarise and Kostenblatt (2018) created an online survey of 54 questions to measure "unpaid internships and the career success of liberal arts graduates." The researchers used branching logic to match questions based on responses. Participants included 3,914 graduates from four-year liberal arts institutions (public, private, large, and small), with a total of 25 institutions represented. The control variables for this study included demographics, academic information, internship characteristics, and proactive personality. Then both long- and short-term career success was measured by "first employment characteristics" the short-term and current "employment characteristics" the long-term career success measure.

The findings from this study confirmed what other researchers have stated: Internships, regardless of compensation status, have significant short-term and long-term career success for graduates. Second, participants who did at least one internship experienced a reduced job search period and reported having a higher salary offer for their first employment out of college and additionally, reporting an annual salary of \$2,082 higher than graduates who did not complete an internship (Guarise & Kostenblatt, 2018).

Hoekstra's (2021) explored the demographic and environmental factors that predict internship participation for undergraduate students. The research questions were [1] Do pre-college demographic and academic characteristics (race, gender, age, first-generation status, income level, transfer status, level of academic motivation, and future educational plans) predict internship participation? [2] Do environmental factors (academic major, commuter status, involvement in co-curricular activities, participation in other high-impact practices, student-faculty interaction, quality of institutional relationships, perceptions of institutional support, and time spent on family and work responsibilities) predict internship participation when controlling for pre-college demographic and academic characteristics?

Hoekstra (2021) employed quantitative methodology with a sample size of 799 full-time seniors at the University of Buffalo, examining internship participation as the dependent variable. Student participation was based on their response to a survey that asked, "Which of the following have you done, or do you plan to do before you graduate?" - "Participate in an internship, co-op, field experience, student teaching, or clinical placement." The responses included "have not decided," "do not plan to do," "plan

to do' and "done or in progress." Hoekstra (2021) found that while many students plan to complete an internship, many still need to participate. There were several barriers to participation, including financial limitations, time constraints, and limited awareness. Furthermore, participation rates vary tremendously based on demographics, the college environment, and experiences while in college. For example, race, gender, age, future educational plans, and first-generation status were predictors of internship participation.

Other results included environmental factors that predicted internship participation. The results showed that high-impact practices significantly predicted internship participation. High-impact practices included study abroad, learning communities, undergraduate research, and capstone projects. Students were likely to participate in internships if they participated in other high-impact practices (Hoekstra, 2021).

Personal Development Outcomes

While most of the literature focuses on the career-related outcomes for students who participate in internships, many other outcomes can be associated with participation in internships. Participation in internships offers several personal and professional outcomes for students. For example, students who participate in internships have their career interests become more refined because they gain first-hand experience in a professional industry where they are allowed to expand their knowledge of that industry through exploration. This allows students to clarify their career aspirations and interests. Often, students get to participate in the industry before having to commit. These experiences offer valuable perspectives for students, especially if they need clarification on the career direction they want to pursue (Hoekstra, 2021). In a pre-and post-test study

of ninety students who completed internships, Pedro (1984) found that students better understood their personal career goals after participating in an internship and reported that their preferences, self-perceptions, work-based needs, and instrumental values were transformed after their internship experience.

Similarly, a report from *LookSharp* reported insights on millennial hiring by various characteristics and industries cited eighty-one percent of graduates said they changed the direction of their careers after completing an internship; they also highlighted the importance of internships for determining career success post-graduation (McCammon, 2016). Students have reported gaining clarity about their aspirations, themselves, and career needs after completing an internship experience (Hoekstra, 2021). Furthermore, students better understood the field and could align themselves with their anticipated career field.

Chapter Summary

The literature on internship impact on liberal arts students significantly benefits stakeholders, including students, employers, and liberal arts institutions. Notably, internships allow students to expand their learning beyond the classroom with hands-on experience of acquired knowledge. Internships expose students to professional work experience during college, allowing them access to skill-based development. Additionally, internships provide reported benefits for short- and long-term career success and students' personal and professional growth. While there are many noted benefits of participating in internships, completion is not a standard requirement for many liberal arts institutions, thus creating inequitable access to internships for low-income students.

Additionally, expanding unpaid internships, especially in the liberal arts, creates barriers to internship access for students, thus increasing disparities between low-income and affluent student participation. There are some noted adverse effects of unpaid internships on students' future career prospects, including long-term financial hardships, higher student loan debt, and exposure to discriminatory practices in the workforce. Many elite institutions are on board with tackling the issue of unpaid internships for students by providing scholarships and stipends to expand internship access for those unable to complete them otherwise.

Overall, the number of students completing internships has increased, including many college graduates completing at least one internship before graduation. Students who have completed at least one internship experience have a more expansive resume, increased employability, higher job prospects, and reduced time searching for full-time employment upon graduation.

While the literature reports several positive correlations with internship completion, student perceptions of internship benefits must be captured. Ensuring that perceived benefits match intended results for students is ideal for ensuring that internship satisfaction is parallel to student experience and an extension of classroom learning.

The next chapter of this study provides an overview of the research methodology, including information about the proposed research design, measurements, participants, procedures, and data analysis for the proposed research questions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the following: rational/methodological approach, study design including potential research site and participants, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, the role of the researcher and positionality, ethical considerations, and limitations. The following research questions were used to explore student perceptions of the internship experience:

1. What motivates liberal arts students to elect to complete an internship for credit?
2. What are their perceptions of the internship experience?

Rationale/methodological Approach

A qualitative case study methodology was employed to describe, evaluate, compare, and understand the phenomenon of liberal arts students' internship experience. Case studies offer a multi-perspective analysis allowing the researcher to investigate the case considering several angles, such as the individual voice, interaction across groups, and interactions within groups (Tellis, 1997). Additionally, case studies also allow for an in-depth and holistic exploration. The advantages of utilizing qualitative inquiry help interpret the magnitude of factors of the specific individual experience (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999).

Qualitative research offers more significant insights into "how" and "why" a phenomenon occurs (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999). Using a qualitative approach, the researcher aims to understand liberal arts students' perceptions of an internship experience. Because of the varying characteristics of internship participation, differences

across internship sites, and ambiguous outcomes of the overall experience, this case study approach allowed the researcher to investigate the internship experience across a group of students to address and answer the research questions:

1. What motivates liberal arts students to elect to complete an internship for credit?

2. What are their perceptions of the internship experience?

The researcher recruited seven currently enrolled or recently graduated students from a liberal arts college at a large public university who had completed internships in Spring 2022 or Fall 2022, prioritizing those who received academic credit. Although fifty students were contacted via email, eight students responded to the outreach and completed the short demographic survey. Seven students met the eligibility criteria and were recruited to participate in the study. One student was contacted and informed of their ineligibility to participate but thanked for their interest. While all participants shared a common experience of taking an internship class for credit during the spring or fall semester, each participant was considered an individual case until the analysis phase of this study. During the data analysis process, the findings utilized a cross-case analysis because all participants were asked to respond to the interview questions considering the internship, they completed the same semester they took the internship course. A case study was conducted to better understand the individual experiences of students during their internships. The study used a bounded case study approach, where each student's internship experience was analyzed separately, based on the semester they took part in the internship course.

Students were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted virtually to accommodate student/alum availability. The participants were recruited via email and fit the following criteria:

1. Earned academic credit by participating in an internship course during Spring 2022 or Fall 2022
2. Completed a paid internship for credit or completed an unpaid internship for credit
3. Currently enrolled at the institution or recently graduated

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to interview students seeking an understanding of their perceptions of their internship experience. The research questions used were based on the researcher's interest in the topic specific of understanding the experiences as it specifically related to liberal arts students. The semi-structured approach guided the conversation, leaving room for participants to engage in the interview based on their comfort level. All interviews were confidential. Confidentiality was assured by de-identifying participants' data, creating pseudonyms for each participant, and ensuring that real names were not used before, during, or after the interviews.

Also, the researcher reassured participants that their information is stored securely on a password-protected device with single-user ownership, and the collected information through recorded virtual interviews is used for scholarly purposes of dissertation coursework requirements and as a guide for a better understanding of how to promote internship opportunities to students.

Study Design

The interviews were conducted via Zoom because online videoing has made it easier to conduct meetings and discussions online, allowing participants to engage with the study from the comfort of their homes and at a convenient time. To encourage students to participate in this study, incentives, flexibility, and convenience were a top priority for students who were significantly busy with other commitments.

The researcher recruited, screened, and interviewed seven recent alums and current liberal arts students. An interview guide was used for face validity. The interviewer used the interview guide to facilitate the interview session, and video recorded the entire process from beginning to end. The researcher recruited students from an internship log used by the professional development office, to track internship participation. Emails were sent to the fifty students on the list who participated in internships either during the Spring 2022 or the Fall 2022 semesters. All interested participants had to complete the eligibility survey and were screened to determine eligibility and availability. Finally, this dissertation's results chapter analyzed and discussed the interpretation of descriptive results, findings, and recommendations for future research.

Location

The study location was a liberal arts college that is one of 17 schools and colleges at a large urban public university in the northeast. Interviews were held online to accommodate the participants' and researchers' schedules. Online video software was used to record and transcribe interviews after the interview period. The participants were allowed to engage virtually to create a sense of comfort and encourage them to be open

and honest during the interview protocol. Finally, IRB approval to conduct this study was obtained in March 2023.

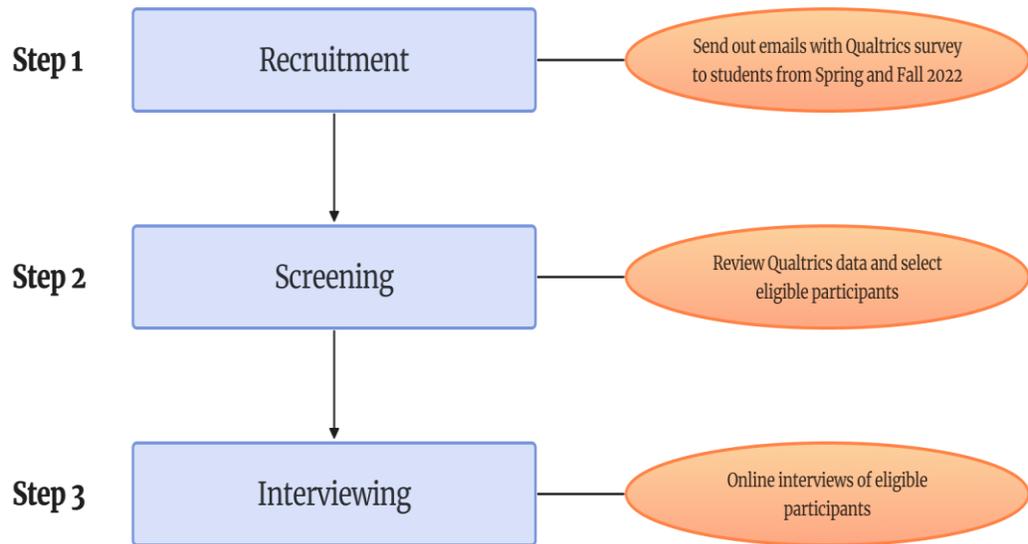
Participants

Outreach emails were sent to fifty participants to solicit interest. Eight participants responded to the email outreach and seven participants qualified to participate based on the eligibility criteria outlined below. Participant needed to have completed the internship course *in the Spring of 2022 or Fall of 2022* and met elements of the following criteria: "*completed a paid internship for credit or completed an unpaid internship for credit,*" and "currently enrolled and/or recently graduated."

Data Collection

Precise data collection and integrity are crucial for gathering information in a measured and systematic manner, ensuring accuracy, and enabling comprehensive data analysis. To complete this study, the researcher designed the following six-step plan to be conducted in two phases: data collection and data analysis. To conceptualize the data collection process of this research project, see the following steps listed below in Figure 4:

Figure 4. Three Step Data Collection Process



Step 1: Recruitment emails are distributed to students on the Spring 2022 and Fall 2022 class logs. The email includes a Qualtrics survey as a screening tool to collect eligibility information. Students are prompted to complete the brief Qualtrics survey by answering questions to determine their eligibility. The recruitment process lasts until all participants have been recruited. Emails are sent weekly to solicit interest.

Step 2: A survey is created in Qualtrics to screen interested parties. Qualtrics is checked daily to screen interested participants. All data from the Qualtrics survey are extracted to a spreadsheet the researcher keeps as their records of participants. Interested students who did not qualify to participate in the study were emailed and thanked for their interest in the project. A separate email is sent to those eligible to participate with a confirmation date and time for the interview. All interview details are finalized, and participants are informed that this is a 60-minute interview with the possibility of a brief follow-up (15-30 minutes) if needed for member checking after initial data collection. A

unique participation link is sent to each participant so they can join the interview at their scheduled date and time.

Step 3: Participants join the online platform on the interview day with their unique participation link. Technology is troubleshot before the interview day to reduce the chances of disruptions occurring. Participants are asked to arrive on time for their interview to ensure it runs smoothly. Each interview is recorded and estimated to run for 60 minutes. During the interview, participants are asked questions from the interview guide. Students are asked to speak clearly to ensure the recording captures their responses accurately.

Sample

The sample for this study includes liberal arts students previously enrolled in an internship course at the host institution in the Spring 2022 or Fall 2022 semester. Students pursuing a liberal arts major can opt to participate in different types of internship opportunities, for example, paid, unpaid, for credit, and non-credit, and across various organizations, profit, non-profit/NGO, and government.

Sample Recruitment

An extensive database of internship participants dating back to the Spring of 2015 is kept by the professional development office at the host institution. This internship log lists all students who have registered and completed an internship for credit between 2015 and now. The database includes information such as student ID, name, start and end date of the internship, primary, number of credits earned, organization/company name, location, how the student learned about the internship opportunity, modality of internship (Hybrid, in-person, online), name of the intern position, supervisor contact information,

hour worked, duties, and whether the internship is paid or unpaid. This extensive list provides an essential foundation for the recruitment strategy.

This *internship course* is considered a general course for liberal arts students wanting to pursue academic credit for their internship. Participation in this course is open to students across the various liberal arts disciplines at the host institution. Students majoring in Psychology, Political Science, or Criminal Justice through Classics or Spanish and Portuguese can participate in this course.

Students were encouraged to participate in the interviews to share their ideas and assist a researcher with completing the requirements for a doctoral degree. Students were advised that participation is optional and did not affect their academic standing. No incentive was provided to students choosing to participate in the interviews. Furthermore, students who responded to the email to express interest were asked to complete a short survey to determine their eligibility for participation.

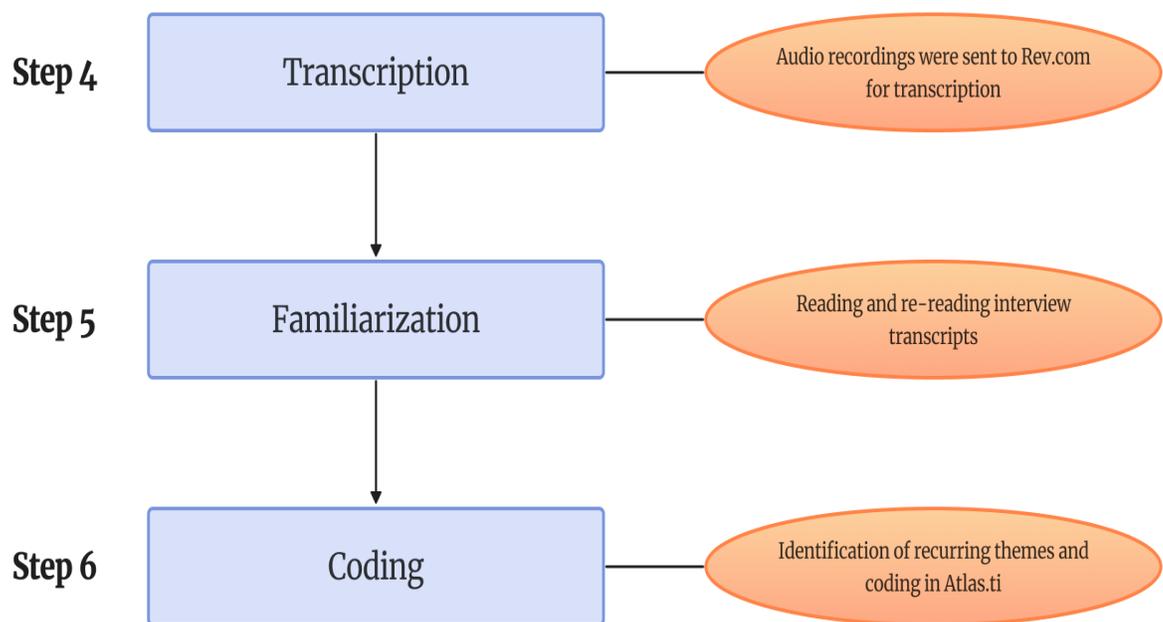
Student Interviews

Once participants were selected, interviews were conducted via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. All interviews were recorded, with each participant agreeing to be recorded before the interview. The interviews elicited richer conversations about student perceptions of their internship experiences. All interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, with the possibility of a brief follow-up (15-30 minutes) if needed for member checking after initial data collection. Interview questions helped guide the conversation, but students were asked to speak truthfully and openly about their experiences.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

This data analysis entails deriving meaningful insights from the gathered information. This process encompasses both summarizing and thoroughly analyzing the responses provided by the participants as well as the observations made by the researcher. A comprehensive understanding of the data is achieved by carefully examining what the participants have conveyed and combining it with the researcher's interpretation. To conceptualize the data analysis process of this research project, see the following steps listed below in Figure 5:

Figure 5. Three Step Data Analysis Process



Step 4: After completing the interviews, students are thanked for participating. The recordings are downloaded and sent to Rev.com virtual transcription company. After transcripts are returned from Rev, they are cleaned and coded in Atlas.ti. The final step of this process includes analyzing the data collected.

Step 5: The researcher familiarizes themselves with the data by reading and re-reading interview transcripts. This strategy allows the researcher to reflect on what was said in the interview and draw conclusions about specific themes recurring throughout the interviews. Then, the researcher color-codes recurring statements to create thematic interpretations.

Step 6: Once the themes have been identified and labeled, the researcher organizes the data to identify relationships between themes. This process allows the researcher to create meaningful connections between the themes to present the collected data.

Data Triangulation

As the only researcher for this study, investigator triangulation was used to enhance the credibility of the research by utilizing Rev.com transcription company to transcribe interviews, ensuring transcripts are accurate and representative of student responses. All transcripts were cleaned and verified to ensure accuracy in reporting. In addition, various copies of transcripts were saved for re-review and accuracy, including recordings being played simultaneously to ensure the word-for-word accuracy of participants' responses and to highlight their voices. Additionally, member checks were incorporated to ensure the transcripts' validation and reporting accuracy.

Coding

Interviews were coded into themes using Rev.com coding software, with a coding dictionary to help the reader interpret the data. Inductive coding was utilized, in which the researcher read the raw data, interpreted it into codes, and created themes. The raw codes were then placed in a coding dictionary, which helped the researcher to interpret

and create the themes to describe the phenomenon of experiences by liberal arts students during internships. The step-by-step coding process will be outlined below:

Step 1: The researcher first familiarized themselves with the data by reading through the transcripts individually to gain a general understanding of the content, its context, and to create initial themes. The researcher took notes throughout on their impressions and themes that came to mind.

Step 2: The researcher decided on the coding framework that was going to be utilized during the coding process. An inductive coding methodology was selected as the researcher analyzed the data through its raw contextual form to gain understanding of the different concepts, themes and/or patterns that was found in the data. The codes were housed in rev.com and they were concise and descriptive where the researcher started with a few broad categories and added more specific codes as they delved deeper into the data.

Step 3: The researcher used inductive coding by reading each transcript in sections based on the interview questions as they related to each of the research questions. Relevant codes were assigned to data based on the concepts they represented. In this step, the researcher focused mainly on capturing the most important themes.

Step 4: The researcher then compared and refined the codes. During this step, the researcher reviewed the codes that they assigned to see if patterns were beginning to emerge. Then, the researcher refined the codes as needed, merging similar ones across the transcripts, and created new interpretative names for the codes that was more consistent with the data. Throughout this process, the researcher continuously cross-referenced codes and readjusted as needed.

Step 5: The researcher ensured there were relationships between the codes, their concepts and how they answered the research questions. Thus, developing relevancy of the data by uncovering its implications for making meaning of the research questions.

Step 6: The researcher focused on the codes that were particularly rich and representative of the research objectives. Then, the researcher developed deeper understanding of these codes and sought to understand and uncover the overarching themes they represented.

Step 7: The researcher ensured consistency and rigor was maintained throughout the coding process. While comparing the codes across transcripts, the researcher ensured that the decisions to code was consistent with the information uncovered in the transcripts. This was done through the process of reading and re-reading to ensure that the codes made sense, and that the researched used the right codes for each section.

Step 8: The researcher then analyzed the codes to create the themes. Once all the data was coded, the researcher did another run through to capture the patterns that emerged and their consistency with the previous literature. The researcher then, grouped similar codes together to create the overarching themes and their subthemes.

Step 9: The researcher then organized the findings around the identified themes and provided examples (through individual quotes) to support each theme and offer explanation for the interpretations.

Step 10: The researcher then reviewed the analysis to ensure its accuracy in reflecting the data collected and its relevancy to the research objectives, questions, and previous literature to support the findings of this research.

Role of Researcher and Positionality

The confidentiality of participants was a priority for this study. Because of the researcher's role in the professional development office as a career development specialist, they must consider their position as the researcher of this study. Measures were taken to ensure that participants were not influenced or coerced by the researcher, into participating in this study due to fear of their academic standing being affected. The recruitment protocol highlighted that participation was voluntary, and participants could decline to continue participating in the study at any time. During recruitment, the researcher spoke openly about this study being part of scholarly dissertation research in hopes of adding to the literature about student perceptions of internship experiences.

Lastly, comprehension of the informed consent form was prioritized to ensure that participants fully understood the purpose and usage of this study. Including, the de-identification of data bolstered participants' confidentiality, primarily because of their status as a current or former student at the host institution.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were a priority in this research to protect the individual identity and status as a student or alum. Research ethics helps to protect scientific integrity, an individual's human rights, and dignity, as well as create trustworthy relationships between researchers and the community (Bhandari, 2022). For this research, trustworthiness between research participants and researcher was paramount for the study design. The study ensured that it displayed respect and dignity for all participants while preventing potential harm by attaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before conducting any research. In addition, participants were made aware that participation is

entirely voluntary and that the decision to participate would affect their status as a student or alum at the host institution. Therefore, all participants were asked to review consent forms in its entirety and ask clarifying questions if needed. Each participant had an opportunity to discuss the content of the consent form before participating in the study, allowing verbal acknowledgement of its understanding and purpose at the beginning of the interview.

Limitations of the Current Study

As with all research, this study had limitations. The first limitation is the location of the study. The proposed study occurred at one school within the host institute and not within the more extensive university system. Therefore, the data collected cannot be used to guide practices for any of the other schools or colleges within the broader university system. For example, this study cannot influence practices in the other colleges within the university. In addition, because this study was conducted at a single institution, it is difficult to compare student experiences across other Liberal Arts institutions of the same size.

The second limitation involves bias within the study. Since the study included students who had previous interactions with the researcher there are potential sources of bias for those who chose to participate. Participation bias might have occurred because of the researcher's positionality and previous interaction with participants. For example, students who chose to participate might have felt connected to the researcher in some capacity and opt to participate because of that connection, thus leading to skewness in the information being collected. Randomization is hailed as the best practice for research because it prevents biases in research from producing untainted data (Suresh, 2011).

While used in human clinical trials and other experiments, randomization reduces the potential for selection bias. In addition, it removes any accidental biases, thus producing comparable results and likely to occur by chance as the source of differences in the potential outcome (Suresh, 2011).

Selection bias might have also occurred because of the targeted sample of students who participated in the study. For example, the researcher's recruited students who participated in one internship course rather than recruiting students who participated in all internship courses within the host institution. The third bias that might have occurred was recollection bias due to the timeline of internship participation and when interviews were conducted. Students might not have recalled the events that occurred during their internships accurately.

Lastly, the presence of personal bias favoring paid internships could potentially lead to erroneous and misleading conclusions. The researcher is committed to rigorously mitigating any personal opinions that could impact the integrity of the study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological approach that the researcher used. The researcher discussed the rationale for selecting the design, location, participants, data collection methodology, sample, recruitment strategy, student interviews, data analysis, and interpretation, study validity, coding strategies, positionality, and the current study's limitations. A qualitative case study methodological approach was employed to describe, evaluate, compare, and understand the phenomenon of liberal arts students' internship experience. The chapter also detailed the research questions that guided this study. Moreover, the chapter discussed the data collection and analysis approach, which was

crucial in guiding this study and ensuring that rich data was collected and analyzed to understand the individual experiences through semi-structured interviews and researcher notes. Lastly, the researcher discussed the study's limitations, like all suitable studies.

The next chapter of this study presents the findings of this research. It discusses the themes that emerged in the data and provides a thick description of the results of the semi-structured interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Chapter four outlines the outcomes of the data collected for this dissertation. It elaborates upon the demographic data of each participant through the individual participant profiles, where pseudonyms were employed to ensure anonymity of participants. Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and participate in a 60-minute interview conducted via Zoom. Chapter four will also identify the themes that emerged in the interviews while answering the research questions this project put forth.

Participant Profiles

The demographic information of the participants reported in this study is summarized in Table 1. This information includes participants' year in college, major, internship site, internship classification (paid vs unpaid), and where they are now. These categories were vital to this study because they allowed the researcher to examine the characteristics of the participants' internships, their motivations, and what they perceived as the benefits of that internship in the long run. The researcher interviewed seven participants: two men, and five women. Four of the seven participants had graduated before they participated in the interviews. Five of the internships were unpaid, whereas two were paid. There were four different groups of liberal arts majors, not all encompassing the full scope of majors within the liberal arts college. Six out of the seven participants interned at non-profit/governmental institutions, and one participant interned at a for-profit organization. Lastly, three of the seven participants have been hired at their internship site or an organization with a similar mission. Two participants are still in

college, one is pursuing graduate education, and one is working towards attending graduate school in the Fall of 2023. Overall, interviews ranged from forty-seven minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes. At the beginning of the interview, participants were allowed to pick a pseudonym before the recording was started to protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality.

Table 1. Participants Snapshot

| <i>Pseudonym</i> | <i>Year in College</i> | <i>Major</i> | <i>Internship Site</i> | <i>Paid/Unpaid</i> | <i>Outcomes</i> |
|------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Cora Marshall | Third Year | Sociology | Non-profit Organization | Unpaid | Fourth Year Student |
| Michael Johnson | Fourth Year | Political Science | Political Organization | Paid | Graduated 2023 and hired at Political Organization |
| Jackson Jackson | Third Year | English | Environmental Non-profit | Unpaid | Fourth Year Student |
| Tori Robinson | Graduated | Criminal Justice | Public Service Organization | Unpaid | Currently studying for the LSAT |
| Michelle Green | Graduated | Criminal Justice | Non-profit Organization | Unpaid | Hired at Non-profit organization |
| Calvin Fisher | Graduated | Political Science | Grassroot Political Organization | Unpaid | Hired at Political organization |
| OG-Toasty | Graduated | Environmental Studies | Corporate Organization | Paid | In Graduate School |

Individual Participant Profiles

Cora Marshall

Cora identifies as a White woman. She is a third-year Sociology student in a liberal arts college. Cora interned at a Non-profit Organization in Spring 2022, the organization caters to immigrants and refugees by providing comprehensive services and support to help build inclusive communities where individuals can thrive. During the interview, Cora stated:

“I knew I wanted to do some kind of internship with immigrants, so I just looked up internship opportunities in [the northeast] with immigration centers or something along those lines. And it was the first thing to come up and it was the only one I applied to, and it worked out. So, I didn’t really have anything in mind I wanted to do, but I just knew I wanted to do some kind of work with immigration.”

Cora’s internship was unpaid.

Michael Johnson

Michael identifies as a South Asian man. He is a fourth-year Political Science and Business student in a liberal arts college. Michael interned at a *political organization* in Fall 2022, the political consulting lobbying firm provides full-service government relations and advocacy communications. Michael disclosed that he is an international student:

“I’m an international student, I’m not born here, so completing an internship would look good on my resume and just open more options after

graduation...Also, I'm genuinely interested in lobbying and political science in the field, so that's what motivated me to reach out to [Political organization]."

Michael shared that he secured a full-time job opportunity with the [Political organization] he interned at upon graduation, which will also provide him with the necessary Visa sponsorship to live and work in the United States. Michael's internship was paid.

Jackson Jackson

Jackson identifies as a Hispanic/Latinx woman. She is a third-year English student in a Liberal Arts College. Jackson interned at an [Environmental Non-profit] in Spring 2022, the nonprofit organization fights for clean air, clean water, clean energy, wildlife and open spaces, and a livable climate. [Environmental non-profit organization] members across the state put grassroots support behind research and advocacy. Jackson's story was interesting because:

I'm really interested in environmental work and non-profit work. And at the time I was still unsure about what major I wanted to do. I was undecided, so I was trying to explore different fields, and back then I was considering an environmental studies major, so I went in to see what work in that area would be like and if I needed some specific knowledge to be able to work in the nonprofit sector and focusing on environmentalism. So, I wanted to check that out, and it turns out that I didn't really have to have the major or really a background in that specific field, and I learned that because all my coworkers, studied different majors and we're all coming from different backgrounds, but we were all doing the same work.

Jackson's internship was unpaid.

Tori Robinson

Tori identifies as a Black woman. She studied Criminal Justice and graduated from a liberal arts college in the Fall of 2022. Tori interned at a [Public Service Organization] in Fall 2022. The [Public Service Organization] provides free legal representation to 70 percent of people arrested in the Northeast. Tori was unsure what she wanted to do when she started college. She stated:

“But I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in criminal justice and being a lawyer just kind of clicked. So, I was an intern, and my supervisor was a paralegal.”

Tori also talked about her passion and drive stemming from her being a native of the northeast,

“I come from the urban area of the northeast, that's why wanting to help incarcerated people it just kind of clicked and resonated with me. But I really enjoyed helping people.”

Tori is currently interning this summer and studying for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) pursuant to law school admission in the fall of 2023. Tori's internship was unpaid.

Michelle Green

Michelle identifies as a Black woman. She studied Criminal Justice and graduated from a liberal arts college in the Summer of 2022. Michelle interned at a [Non-profit Organization] in Spring 2022. The [Non-profit Organization] is a coalition of grassroots organizations, community groups, and non-profit organizations in the United States of

America committed to uniting the poor across color lines as the basis for a broad movement to abolish poverty. Michelle completed this internship because:

“I knew that I needed a lot of credits in the spring. ‘Cause I had kind of messed up Fall 2021, and I still wanted to graduate, I needed an overload. And I was like, why not complete an internship? This was basically why I was at the fair so that I could have a full 16-credit spring and then do some credit stuff over in the summer. And I do have an interest in social justice and things of that sort. And they were very focused on eradicating poverty, helping homeless people, and things like that. So, I was intrigued by the organization.”

Michelle currently works at a similar Non-profit Organization. Michelle’s internship was unpaid.

Calvin Fisher

Calvin Fisher identifies as a White man. He studied Political Science and graduated from a liberal arts college in the Fall of 2022. Calvin interned at a [Grassroot Political Organization] in Spring 2022, the candidate ran to represent the Northeast 3rd congressional district for in the United States House of Representatives. Calvin shared his story about why he interned with this political campaign:

I saw an email from the newspaper from my college about an alum who’s running for Congress. And I thought this was someone who was in another state or had studied business and not, was like 45 years old, white guy or whatever. And I found out that all my assumptions were wrong. The candidate was not yet 30 or really vibe with my politics and was working a half hour away from me. So, I started volunteering and they were looking for interns. I was finishing my degree

in political science at the time, and I didn't know if I had the time to work it in, but through some bureaucratic stuff, managed to get credit for the work I did with them.

Calvin currently works at a similar political organization. Calvin's internship was unpaid.

OG-Toasty

OG-Toasty identifies as a White woman. She studied Environmental Studies and graduated from a liberal arts college in the Spring of 2022. OG interned at a [Corporate Organization] responsible for performance ingredients and technology in some of the biggest and most successful brands in the world. [Corporate Organization] uses smart science to turn renewable raw materials into innovative ingredients by harnessing innovation to create market-leading products and ensure a positive effect on the environment and society. OG shared her journey to securing this internship which included:

“I applied to over 80 internships at that point to try to find something because I had stress from my parents who were like, you need to make money. And then I was like, I just want experience. And I saw [Corporate Organization] had an environmental health and safety internship, and I was not even 21 at the time, and I was so stubborn. I was like, I'm doing a paid internship.”

OG is currently attending graduate school pursuing a master's degree. OG's internship was paid.

Emergent Themes

This section highlights the emergent themes discovered during the data analysis process and how they relate to and answer the research question guiding this research.

The following research questions are designed to explore the perceptions of the internship experience from a student lens and voice. This study explored the following research questions:

1. What motivates liberal arts students to elect to complete an internship for credit?
2. What are their perceptions of the internship experience?

To answer the questions posed, participants were interviewed using semi-structured questions, which guided the conversation leaving room for participants to engage in the interview based on their comfort level. Participants were encouraged to share their honest thoughts and feelings and express their experiences and perspectives using their voices to the best of their knowledge. While each participant’s internship was a unique experience, similarities were seen in their responses, phrasing, perceptions, and experiences, which led to the emergence of the below major themes for research question 1 and 2. The themes that emerged for research question 1 are outlined in table 2 below:

Table 2. Emergent themes and sub-themes for research question 1

| <i>Research Question 1: What motivates liberal arts students to elect to complete an internship for credit?</i> | | |
|--|--|------------------------------|
| Theme 1 | Theme 2 | Theme 3 |
| Academic credit as an incentive | Career clarification through internships | Career Development |
| Sub-themes: | Sub-themes: | Sub-themes: |
| Reduction of Academic Stress | Exploring Interest and Career Paths | Learning and Personal Growth |
| Alternative to not Receiving Payments for the Internship Opportunity | Navigating Uncertainty around Career Choices | Career Planning |

The mentioned themes and sub-themes were the most relevant to the research questions and to advancing this research. Therefore, it is appropriate to share these opinions in the participants' voice.

Research Question 1: What motivates liberal arts students to elect to complete an internship for credit?

Theme 1: Academic Credit as an Incentive

The significance of experiential learning as a high-impact practice is unquestionable; however, the realm of student motivations behind their participation still needs to be explored. There are two compelling reasons why delving into student motivation is crucial. Firstly, motivation serves as the driving force behind their active engagement in these experiences. Secondly, comprehending the reasons that motivate students directly influences the learning process, impacting the outcomes they achieve (Coker & Porter, 2016). A pivotal aspect to consider is the variation in motivations among students, making it imperative to discern both the conscious and unconscious factors that come into play. This understanding ultimately paves the way for enhancing the overall quality of experiential learning endeavors.

Michael Johnson discussed their motivation behind earning academic credit for their internship at a Political Organization:

My internship was not required, but I added an internship course that allowed me to get credits. By taking the internship course, I could earn three credits for completing my internship. This created space in my schedule to also add a business minor in my sophomore year of college. I decreased my workload by doing an internship. So, it just made things easier because I didn't have to take an extra coursework, I just had to do my internship and the weekly assignments, and it was easy.

Tori Robinson motivation for earning academic credit for their internship at the Public Service Organization stemmed from a similar sentiment as other participants:

So, my thinking was, if I add anything extra to my already full college schedule, it must make sense and I must benefit from it. So, it just made sense for me to receive credit for my internship, while I take a class with it. The internship course counted for two classes, and it took the stress off me as a student. I didn't have to worry about exams or homework or going to class because the internship and the class attached to it, replaced those things.

Michelle Green believes in making the best of their college experience through smart decisions. Michelle talked about finding ways to maximize their experience and ensure that they were making the best decisions for their degree. Michelle's motivations were clearly stated like the other participants:

I knew I needed between 16 credits to 18 credits to ensure that I could graduate on time. So, my goal for spring was packing up my schedule and the internship was a part of that way to get academic credit for the course and credit for what I'm doing in the field. And I would've never done an internship to not be receiving anything. If that is the case, I'm going to go and volunteer for that. I'm not going to do an internship and not be receiving money and not be receiving credit. As a broke college student. I cannot be volunteering hours and hours of my time when I already had six classes, an internship and work.

Jackson Jackson's motivation for earning academic credit for their internship at an Environmental Non-profit differed slightly, but centers around the same premise as other participants:

Because I had an easier semester regarding coursework, and so the opportunity to get my internship for credits and have it go towards my degree, was a no brainer. This was an incentive because I was taking less classes and I was going to get work experience with it.

College students are juggling many responsibilities daily. Therefore, it is crucial to understand what motivates them to choose one activity over the other. When thinking about motivation, students are motivated by different yet similar aspects of the experience. Each participant elected to complete an internship for different reasons. Some

talked about the incentive of earning academic credits, having an easier semester for their senior year, gaining practical hands-on experience, and finding career guidance.

Sub-Theme 1: Reduction of Academic Stress

The participants talked about the pressures that come with being a college student. The greatest pressure as a college student is the academic pressure which comes from the rigorous college coursework which is often demanding. Students face a lot of pressure to perform well by maintaining good grades, completing their assignments on time, and excelling in exams. While the pressures of college vary by student, the participants shared how participation in internships helped them reduce some academic stress.

OG-Toasty talked about how earning academic credit for their internship in their senior year helped ease some stress for them:

I decided to take my internship for academic credit because it was my senior year. And the internship courses tended to be a lighter load of work. It wasn't something that was going to be very hefty. I wanted to be able to talk about this opportunity and learn from it. So that's why I took it for academic credit. Cause I was like let's get the credits with it and let's make sure I can apply it afterwards.

Calvin Fisher also shared how their internship allowed them to reduce some academic stress by stating this:

Earning academic credit for my internship helped me not have to take an additional class before I graduate. But then it also helped me get that hands-on experience in a field that I was super interested in.

Academic pressure affects many college students. These pressures are a result of many factors of the college experience and pressure from the institution, parents, peers, and themselves. A few of the participants found ways to combat those academic pressures to ensure that they maximized their overall college experience.

Sub-Theme 2: Alternative to not Receiving Payment for the Internship Opportunity

Participation in an internship requires a big commitment from students. These commitments vary widely depending on factors specific to the industry. When participating in an internship, students commit their free time, because they typically work for a specific amount of time during their internship. This time commitment could be months at a time, semester-based, or even a full year. Participants in this study talked about how these commitments can be taxing especially if no payment is involved. However, the participants mentioned that they were motivated by receiving academic credit for their internship when payment was not an option.

Cora Marshall shared their opinion on how academic credit for their internship was able to make up for the lack of payment:

So basically, getting academic credit for my internship was able to make up a little bit for not being paid because I was getting a good benefit out of earning academic credit. Otherwise, it would've been just volunteering, while I do like to volunteer, getting academic credit made it worthwhile to participate in the internship experience.

Michelle shared a similar thought on the incentive that came with the academic credit for their internship experience:

lot of times people do internships, and they don't take academic credit with it. So just doing an internship on your own, not kind of reporting it, nope, that was never going to be the option for me. I knew I needed 18 credits, so my whole goal for spring was packing up my schedule and the internship was a part of that way to get credit for the course and credit for the experience. I would've never done an internship and not be receiving anything for it.

While the participants of this study did not focus heavily on monetary incentives as a motivator for completing internships, many of them embraced alternative incentives as motivators for participating in internships and helping with navigating their career prospects throughout their college journey.

Theme 2: Career Clarification through Internships

Uncertainty about a career is a source of stress for undergraduate students. Many students engage in experiential learning opportunities, such as internships, to immerse themselves in the workplace to gain clarity about the skills and qualifications needed for career clarification (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011). In the Liberal Arts, career readiness is focused on demonstrating adequate competencies by graduates to adapt to the workplace (NACE, 2019). Consequently, students believe engaging in internships for career clarification will reduce their stress when navigating the job market and preparing them for life post-college.

Cora Marshall discussed how their internship at the Non-profit Organization helped them with career clarification when it came to selecting employment post-college:

So, it helped me realize that working with immigrants is something that I do want to get into, but also it made me realize that it's true. Nonprofits, you don't make as much money as you could in another type of job. So, it helped me realize that although this, it's not the best-paying type of job, it is still something I want to get into because it is work that makes a difference.

And I also had some conversations with my internship supervisor about what I want to do directly after I graduate because I'm planning on maybe moving abroad and working. And she had done that exact thing in where I want to go, so she was able to give me some recommendations for programs and stuff. So even something that's not directly linked to the work we were doing in my internship, just making those connections helps, helped with deciding what to do after I graduate. And yeah, it really solidified me thinking that I wanted to do some kind of work with immigrants and not even exactly what I did with my internship, but it made me realize that there's a lot of options because in this organization, there was so many programs and different things to do, so there's things I don't even know that is possible to do. So, it made me a little less nervous about finding a job eventually.

Tori Robinson shared a similar experience in how they sought career clarification by completing an internship at the Public Service Organization:

I know for me, for me it made me realize, okay, maybe I do want to step into things that are closer in that lane of my internship at the Public Service Organization, so it basically narrowed it for me. Because sometimes if you don't have an internship, you know can be like, okay, I'm out of college, I really don't know what I'm going to do. I'm just applying for anything. And that's how people end up working at jobs that don't have anything to do with their major. So having that narrowed down a search as like, okay, this is really what I want to do, or this is what I want to do for the time being until something else piques my interest. And it gauges, I don't want to say gauges the gap, but as I said, people, they are like, yeah, I went to school for this and I'm doing this now. But it's like with their internship, it'll help you. It's like a bridge that connects the two.

OG-Toasty also shared their experience with their internship at a corporate organization, and how it helped them figure out what is next for them in life:

Oh yeah. Doing an internship was essentially to figure out what I wanted to do with life, specifically getting paid and learning. I think internships give students a look into what their life could be like after school. Because let's face it, if you went from kindergarten, you graduated high school and then you just did another four years of university. Unless you've done work, you've probably worked retail, you've probably worked food, stuff like that. And it gives people, gives students a look into what could my life possibly look like when I'm done with school. That's a very paralyzing moment. You've been at school for 17, 18 years and you're like, what do I do now? And internships are just so important because they can give a student that investigate what does life look like after college? How do adults that we don't know, not our parents, not our friends' parents. How do adults that we learn about, and we work with, how did they transition out of college into full-time?

While not explicitly stated, Jackson Jackson's reason for participating in an internship at an Environmental Non-profit was very similar to the other participants reason for participating in their internships:

I wanted to learn what it meant to work in a nonprofit like [Environmental Non-profit]. I wanted to just see what that would look like. I think this internship was meaningful to me. I learned a lot, and I take a lot from that experience regarding my personal expectations. I kind of didn't know what to expect really. But I think that if my goal was to just have more direction and gain some experience, then yeah, I met my expectations.

Calvin Fisher found so much career clarity from their internship. Calvin mentioned spending several years trying to figure out what they were going to do,

Calvin's internship at a grassroots political campaign helped them find clarity in where they were headed, career wise:

I found out what the hell I wanted to do with my life. That's a big thing. After spending five years of my life, banging my head against a professional wall that just made sense this time, please, let's find a thing that works or at least that I can deal with. And coming up dry, I was reticent to be, find a job that I would ever actually care about at all. And I knew that. I knew that I wasn't, that I wasn't able to spend my life doing math and getting my fulfillment elsewhere, but I didn't know exactly what shape that would take in until I found this internship and launched me into the budding career that I have today. So, I wish it paid a little more so that I could move out, but I'm fine right now. I can do that next year.

Lastly, Michael Johnson already had an idea of what they wanted to do long-term but had plans to do other things in the meantime before progressing into the field that they essentially want to spend the rest of their career doing:

I'm really interested in international relations and foreign relations. So, working at [Political Organization] really helped me develop a foundation for local politics, and city politics, which is the most important because that's what directly affects its citizens. So, using that as a foundation, I can move on to bigger things like federal lobbying and international relations. I want to go to law school. After getting to gain practical experience and using my experience from work, I would move into the private sector.

Michelle Green was the only participant who did not explicitly gain career clarity from their internship. Michelle talked about how the internship at the Non-profit Organization did not exactly meet their expectations. Michelle talked about having an interest around social services, but wanted to see what the field entailed, hence their reason for participating in the internship at the Non-profit Organization. Overall, Michelle thought the internship provided them with other skills but did not give them clarity for future careers since they already had an idea before going into this internship.

Sub-theme 1: Exploring Interest and Career Paths

As mentioned in Chapter 2, interns are a good source of help for organizations, especially during busy periods when they can hire interns for short periods. The employer and student benefit from this short-term agreement where employers gain part-time help without full-time expenses (Maskookie et al., 1998; Stiglitz, 1975), and students gain training in a field of their career interest (Zopiatis, 2007). Career interests in the Liberal Arts vary because one can explore many different career paths. Exploring interests and career paths can help students figure out their next steps. While conducting interviews, the participants talked about how their internships helped them explore their interests and the various career paths available in their fields of interest.

Jackson Jackson talked about how they completed an internship to explore different career paths and decide on the major they would later pursue at their institution.

Jackson stated:

Yeah, so I'm really interested in environmental work and non-profit work. And at the time I was still unsure about what major I wanted to do. I was undecided, so I was trying to explore different fields, and back then I was considering an environmental studies major, so I went in to see what work in that area would be like and if I needed some specific knowledge to be able to work in the nonprofit sector and focusing on environmental environmentalism. So, I wanted to check that out and turns out that I didn't really have to have the major or a real background in that specific field, and I learned that because all my coworkers were from, they studied different things and we're all coming from different backgrounds, but we were all doing the same work. Furthermore, it helped me not go into it, even though I still like it and I still think it's interesting. I realized that I could just go after something that I liked and that I enjoyed. And I'm majoring in English now, so I did not go that route at all. But I saw that even though I was going to study something else, there was what I learned from what I'm studying now, I can apply to whatever.

OG-Toasty had a similar experience, where they were interested in a specific field and wanted to try their internship to see if this was something they see themselves pursuing long-term. OG-Toasty stated:

Do I want to work in environmental health and safety? Maybe I need to go into more nonprofit work. Maybe I need to go into governmental work. So, I wanted to start really sussing out the pool. Figuring out what I could do and if the people at [Corporate Organization] saw something in me, if they liked me and I liked it, I didn't want to work at [Corporate Organization]. However, I could now take this experience in environmental health and safety and go to other companies. Like I said, I wanted to cast the wide net to make myself very marketable towards every sector that I possibly could, whether it be policy or the chemical industry. And I think I wanted that experience. So, I did the daily commute, having to wake up at six-thirty in the morning. I got that full experience of what it's like to work and sit at a desk, work at a chemical plant. Because I think a lot of times people will work full-time for so long, they forget what that transition is like to try working in a different field. And then in my case, having this internship helped me decide what I don't want to do. Do I want to go to graduate school? I was on the fence. Then I worked in this industry, and it was not for me. I went to go to graduate school instead.

Calvin Fisher's situation was slightly different, but also like the other participants.

Calvin came from the Engineering field and knew the importance of completing internships when switching to the Liberal Arts because this field was not as specific as the field they were pursuing before this career switch. Calvin stated:

And I tried a couple of different things for a while. So, the Pennsylvania primary was delayed in 2020 due to covid and I had an opportunity to be a poll worker. That was kind of my first political thing. So, I worked as a judge of elections for two years or for two years, four elections in a row. I did a great job, I loved it. And I got into the Harrisburg semester, where you could work at the Pennsylvania capital in Harrisburg for a semester. I was super excited to do. I worked for [Legislative services] as a reporting intern and that's where I learned that it's nice to be around these politicians all the time, but it was the worst kind of reporting because I couldn't even ask questions. It was all about taking notes about what was going on and being in the background. And I knew I did not want to do that. I didn't change my whole degree because I wanted to sit on the sidelines and write about other people doing stuff. That change? Tough too, my first instinct is I'd want to do it for more time, but that's just me speaking as someone who now does that. So, I wish I'd rotated through a few different things. I was pretty much exclusively in the field department

of some door knocks and phone calls and all of that. And that's where I work right now. And I like it.

Cora Marshall talked about their interest in pursuing immigration-based work and how being a Spanish major, they were unsure how those skills could be leveraged for a job. While interning at Non-profit organization, Cora was able to infuse both their interest in immigration with their Spanish skills to gain experience. Cora stated:

My internship was not really something specific to my major since I was studying Spanish. So even branching out and doing an internship and something that you're just interested in and maybe could see yourself doing in the future, even if it's not specifically within your major. Yeah, I think doing internships are important because there are so many skills that you can gain from them that you don't even expect to get going into it. And it's really a good way to get experience with some kind of profession that you could have in the future without being really tied down by it. And you can also realize that maybe that's not something you wanted to do. And just overall skill, working in a very professional environment because any job I've ever had was just a retailer part-time job. So being able to be in that kind of environment before I even graduated was a good opportunity.

Tori Robinson started college with no direction, except for the fact that they wanted to pursue a career in criminal justice and law specifically. However, Tori was unsure what area of law and the specifications of law included, so pursuing an internship helped them explore their interests and career paths on a more in-depth level. Tori stated:

Yeah, so I think I did want to further pursue a career in law just because I feel like I, specifically didn't know what that career would entail, I enjoyed my internships. And I think the good thing about internships is that you get to do as many as you can during undergrad and even after you know, graduate just to see what that area entails. And okay, this is what I like, and this is what I don't. So always go in with an open mind. So, I was always open-minded, okay, even if I don't like this, it's still an experience. I still can connect with people and other perspectives, especially people who are older than me or on the same career path because a lot of my mentors, they're older and that was closer to my age.

Michael Johnson talked about the benefits of participating in internships, especially because students will gain practical experience in their fields. Michael highlighted that because there is not a clear-cut direction for liberal arts students, it is important to participate in activities that provide that beyond the classroom experience and exploration of career fields. Michael stated:

Internships, it's going to give them experience in whatever field they're pursuing. Practical experience, mentorship, and job shadowing with people who have experience in whatever field. So, I've always wanted to do an internship, and I did, and it's helped me get a job here after college. So just networking and putting yourself out there.

Yes, of course. And in [my institution], I think you must, because it's not like the School of Business. If you're an accounting major or finance, you're much more likely to get a job related to that field and especially if you're in computer science. You're much more likely to get a job because there are more jobs out there today that are specific to those areas. If you're a liberal arts major, first, the pay is less than the other majors, and it's much harder, it's a people business. So, I think if you don't do an internship if you're in the School of Business, you could still apply on Handshake [an online recruiting platform that higher education students use to find jobs and internships] to a bunch of jobs, and they're probably going to get it. But if you're in the liberal arts and you haven't done an internship, you don't have practical experience, you're a senior, you're like, oh, now what do I do? So, it's just good for all, for the common good. And it's the right time to do an internship and see what you like and what you don't like.

Although stated differently, each participant came to the very similar conclusion that engaging in internships can yield positive outcomes, especially for students in the Liberal Arts where careers are not as clear cut as other areas such as business and computer science. Also, participants thought an internship was very beneficial for exploring interests and different career paths, primarily since one degree encompasses many different areas.

Sub-theme 2: Navigating Uncertainty around Career Choices

Career planning in this postindustrial time has created uncertainty regarding future career prospects for college students (James et al., 2020). Many students in the Liberal Arts are forced to grapple with navigating uncertainty in their career quest.

Many people face uncertainty around careers. Tori Robinson shared their experience of complete uncertainty when starting college, Tori referred it to a blind man walking. However, mentioned while being completely clueless about what the future held, exploring different internships helped provide clarity on next steps for Tori. Here is what Tori stated:

I think that when I started college, it's a blind man walking. I didn't really, of course I knew people who went to college, but personally I felt like I was doing this by myself. So, it's, I went to study abroad, I didn't really like it. The pandemic hit and I had to come back and adjust to that. So, it is just like I must do something to make these short three years count. So, I try to do as many internships and volunteer opportunities as I can while I can. So, I think that I'm proud of myself because I've taken risks. And even though it was a lot of long nights, I was tired, but it was worth it. The last two years where we were back in person, I did the most, I met with different people in my field. I was trying to be at every career fair. So, it was like, yeah, I didn't just go to school. And it's like my internship experience wasn't bad at all. I have taken everything with a grain of salt and learned lessons and different things. So, it's like, have an open mind, don't get frustrated and it's not permanent, it's temporary. If you don't like it, you could do another one next semester.

Michelle described her internship as “not a great professional experience, but an enlightening one” that opened their eyes and made them aware of red flags in organizations, the job search process and managing their expectations. This is what Michelle stated:

Even though this internship did not meet my expectations. I just feel like I'm aware of more red flags in organizations. I try not to have this view overall for nonprofits. Because their lack of organization doesn't necessarily mean that that's how it is for all places. But it does stay in the back of my mind when I look at certain companies, like what I do when I research, how can this company be a

good fit for me, and what I ask in interviews so that I can feel like I'm getting a better feel of what goes on in this company and how they support their workers. But I am still interested in working for nonprofits. And yeah, no, I did not stay in contact with the people at my internship site. They alluded to the fact that they need more people and would be happy to have us. I knew that was not happiness for me. So, I did not feel I needed to stay in contact with them.

OG-Toasty shared very similar sentiments when it came to completing an internship to explore career options and figure out what to do. Here is what OG had to say:

I think my personal expectation was essentially just to learn. Just learn, just grow, and just help you figure out what you want. And it meant that and more, I was so proud of myself for being able to retain the information that I learned. It proved to me that I am adaptable and that I am resilient in some ways. And even if I'm having a tough time, I always show up and I always make sure that I am supportive. And I think [Corporate Organization] did meet all those expectations in the sense of it taught me what I wanted to do and what I didn't want to do, how to work with people, how to be resilient in the face of going through difficult personal times, going through a pandemic. And I think it aligned with my personal goals. I mean, I think there was a part of me that was like, yeah, this is what I, I hope this is what I want to do so I can just get a job with them. And it, it'd be easy because everyone likes when things are easy, but it more so, as I said, told me, yeah, this is not what you want to do. So, this is a step forward.

Cora Marshall, talked about being unsure of the benefits of participating in internships. However, Cora talked about how they were encouraged to participate in internships. After completing an internship, Cora was able to understand the reason for doing them:

I think before I did my internship, I was kind of like, oh, it's just something that people have told me I should be doing. But I was like, do I really need to worry about this or focus on this? But it is important and I'm relieved to have one done because I'm not sure if I will do another one. But relieved to gotten it done early so I realize what I want to do so I can focus on some classes that will push me in that direction.

While Michael Johnson's experience was not exactly like the other participants, they've had similar experiences around figuring out what career they're interested in by completing internships. This is what Michael stated:

I was really interested in international relations and foreign relations. So, working at [Political Organization] really helped me develop a foundation for local politics, and city politics, which is most important because that's what directly affects its citizens. So, using that as a foundation, I can move on to bigger things like federal lobbying and international relations. I wanted to make as many connections as I could, meaningful connections, and I think I was successful in being able to do that.

Uncertainty around career choices affects many students in the liberal arts, especially when it comes to job search post-graduation. Although career choices seem endless, all participants got something from their internship experience that helped them build confidence in their decision-making skills, thus, providing them with some certainty in what career path they need to take post-graduation.

Theme 3: Career Development

Career Development is the continuous process of understanding oneself, investigating options, and acting (Gray, 2023). College students should move through the different stages of career development to achieve their goals. Some stages include assessments, skill development, goal setting, and planning. College students should actively engage in these activities to increase their employability. Many participants agreed to try internships to embark on their career development journey.

Cora Marshall knew that they needed to participate in internships to develop their skills set, while setting goals for themselves as they planned. This is what Cora had to say:

Because you're never going to know if you're really going to enjoy something if you don't have that practice first. And it's a really good experience to be able to see other people who know what they're doing in that job and being able to shadow them or follow them and get advice from them.

Michael Johnson knew the impact of networking for career development, they understood that they needed to build as many connections as they could to position themselves for their career plans post-graduation. Michael was able to leverage their internship to gain a full-time job and visa sponsorship post-graduation. This is what Michael said:

I think this internship will have a net positive in my job search, because I have made so many connections, so many network networks in Philly and New York. I can reach out to so many people if I ever need a job, and they will reach out to me if they need my help. During my internship I was able to develop my public speaking skills, making connections with people, interpersonal skills, which is the biggest, most important skill to have in this business. Just research skills mostly, which is equally important because you need to know what you're doing. So just doing your homework and due diligence.

Tori Robinson views internships as an extension of what is learned in the classroom. Tori believes that you need to step out of the classroom to gain hands-on experience because career fields change so often but classroom curriculum seems to remain stagnant. Tori believes that with the changing time, students should try as many internships as they possibly can, so they stay up to date on their skills. Tori stated:

I feel like internships are good because it's going to teach you what the classroom isn't. A lot of times when you're in a classroom, the stuff that you learn about is material that's been taught for forever, maybe 10 years ago. You never know how they change the curriculum or whatever when you're learning. Because I've talked to students like, yo, yeah, we learned the same thing. And that was what, four years ago when I was a freshman. So, when you're in an internship, it gives you the chance to handle what's you're learning in class. But with updated time, when you look at some of the graphs and charts, you'll see from 2020, and even when you go online, it's hard to find stuff that's up to date because the world is constantly changing. So, when you do internships, you get the perspective. Yeah, you can mix the material that you learn with stuff that's going on every single day. So, I think that's one of the big benefits of internships. I like that. And flexible, most

internships, they understand that you're a student and they work with your schedule as well.

Michelle Green has a keen understanding of how to make the best out of your college experience so that you can position yourself for success post-graduation. Michelle believes that you need to make time for things that will be fulfilling, but also help you figure out what career you will pursue. Michelle's thoughts are stated below:

I mean, they're helpful. If you're getting experience, you're getting money in some certain situations, you're getting credit in others doing it with, it's like doing it without the incentive. I don't know. I'm not going to sit here and say that I wouldn't volunteer, and it's like morally fulfilling because the work is meaningful. But at the end of the day, I feel like when you're in college, you're working towards a bigger goal. If all your time cannot be spent on meaningful, morally fulfilling experiences like a volunteer worker or an internship, which I feel like are kind of synonymous with being a volunteer and a quote intern. It's just not realistic. You must find the time for it. If it's not built, if it's not something that's required, you're really doing it because you think it's going to be good and help you in the long run because it can connect you to a job or provide you with a good professional connection. There's always something to gain if it is a good internship.

Jackson Jackson's thoughts on internships and how they help with career development:

I think they're important. You learn so much from it, and not just about the professional world, but also about yourself. There is so much to gain, and it is really time consuming, but I think it's worth it. And if, I don't know, if there's a student that is just like, oh, I need to build up my resume, then why not? But there's so much more than that.

Although not all participants approach their career development the same way, most understand the benefits of participating in internships and how they can help position their careers. Within the liberal arts, almost all students' journeys will differ depending on their chosen path.

Sub-theme 1: Learning and Personal Growth

Dewey's (1938) learning model is the foundation of experiential learning. It focuses on how learning translates an individual's impulses, feelings, and desires of

concrete experiences into higher-order purposeful action (Kolb, 1984). The four cycles include *Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation of the New Experience, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation*. It is essential when students can reflect on their learning experiences from their internships, especially when they can relate to their in-class learning experiences and skill set.

Cora Marshall talks about how much they got out of their internship. Especially how this internship improved their learning while building on some skills they already possessed. Additionally, Cora was able to self-reflect on their privileges and how it relates with the internship population they served:

Yeah, I learned a lot. Before my internship, I had to do some trauma training. And so, I learned a lot about just some things that refugees go through, and I guess it made me realize that I am lucky to have what I have. So that was one thing. And I guess I've always been a little bit nervous to do outreach things. I said I haven't done outreach things before and I haven't, but more so with writing emails and etiquette and stuff. So, I guess just gave me the confidence that I can do that and that whenever I received positive feedback that I was doing it right. So, a little bit of confidence there.

Michael Johnson shared some similar experiences where they were able to learn about the field, Michael was interested in pursuing as a career. They also talked about how much more they still need to learn even though they were hired for a full-time position:

So going into this internship, I wanted to go to law school. After gaining practical experience and using my experience from work, I would move into the private sector after completing law school. I did have preconceived notions of what lobbying was like, and it was a lot, doing a lot of research, and in the end, going to, literally going to Harrisburg, the Capitol, and going into the offices of Republicans and trying to convince them why we need federal funding for our clients. So overall, it was a great experience, a great learning experience for me as an intern. I believe I got the most out of it because I put myself out there and going into my final year in college, I'm going to be joining them as a full-time lobbyist. So, it all worked out in the end. The reason I'm going back is because I still have a lot of learning to do. I was only an intern for about almost a year, and I

don't have full experience as a lobbyist. It was more of their research part of the work.

Tori Robinson described always approaching tasks with an open mind. They talked about the willingness to try different things regardless of the outcome. Tori has completed many internships where they were able to learn and gain new skills, experiences, and connections. Overall, Tori believes that in addition to the classroom learning, hands on experience in your actual field of interest helps to build confidence in your skillset and deepen your understanding for the career field you are pursuing:

So, I feel like when you start an internship, you kind of have a general idea of what you're going to do. But when they start using the specific terms, and stuff like that, you're like, okay, you don't really understand. So, I think that you must, like I said, go in there with an open mind and you must understand that you're going to learn these terms, you're going to learn these different things. So now I can look back and it be like, okay, they did everything that they said they were going to do, and I can understand these terms. So, it's like the fear of the unknown. And it's just a class in a sense. It is giving you the opportunity, opportunity to learn again or learn outside of the classroom.

So, approach it as if it's a class when it's not the, oh, this is a syllabus. When you start a class, you get the syllabus. I don't know what these assignments mean. You don't really know anything. But I bet after you complete the class, you go back and be like, okay, it all makes sense now. So, it's the same test or concept. Yeah, especially because it was a schedule. I don't really remember the schedule, but I know I would go, I think a couple Wednesdays was my office days where I just sat in and did paperwork and stuff, but that wasn't too boring for me either. And the rest of the days I would go to the courtroom, and we would be in here and we would write down demographics like age, race, contact information and those type of things. And we would go back to the office, put them in the system, and then call the family just to let them know how it went if they didn't attend the hearing. But everything was straightforward.

Calvin Fisher knew what they wanted to pursue as a career interest but was not sure about the day-to-day operations of that specific field. However, they believed that when you emerge yourself into that field you learn by gaining clarity of what to expect in your field of interest:

It taught me a lot about how campaigns operate. I didn't know what went on in a campaign other than, you talk to people. You knock on doors; you make phone calls. I didn't get it. I had no idea what the backend was like. I didn't know the organizational structure. I didn't know the skillsets required. So that was very valuable for me to learn; how these organizations operate, and what it's like working in one from day to day. I had more to say, asking people, would you mind repeating your question? I thought I would learn about campaigns, and I really did. It exceeded my expectations because they hired me and have hired me twice. And this is the field I work in now, which I didn't expect going in. I thought I would learn how they operate and gain a better understanding of what it's like to work with candidates and with people who are involved in electoral politics.

And I didn't expect to make my life about it. I came in wanting to know what it's like and cruising my options of what am I going to do with this different degree. And I walked out with luck of the draw. It met my expectations. My supervisors are very willing to work with me to get the bureaucratic stuff done, to teach me stuff when I asked to support me when I had questions and to help me build skills that I could use later.

Completing an internship as an undecided student was Jackson Jackson's situation. However, Jackson was aware of some of the skills they possessed but was not sure how those skills translated to the workplace. While on their internship, Jackson was able to learn a great deal about the field and become confident in their own skills:

Well, I took this [required professional development course all liberal arts students must take before graduation]. What is that? My freshman year. And we basically talked about how to prepare all your materials. We went through all the resources that class has to offer. So that class really helped me. I had an awesome professor who taught me a lot. And then I started to work with her, and then I got an inside scoop. And then, yeah, I was really prepared to succeed during my internship. I think internships are great. They're a good opportunity because it helped me figure out where I wanted to go and what things I was good at in the workspace.

Learning and personal growth go hand in hand with career development.

Participating in internships during college is the best time for students to work on becoming confident in their skillset. The participants spoke about their career development and how it affected their personal growth.

Sub-theme 2: Career Planning

Careful career planning is essential for career success post-graduation. Finding a job that fits students' interests, characteristics, and work environment is essential for post-graduate outcomes. Ensuring that the organization aligns with its values, needs, and preferences leads to greater satisfaction in career choices (Callanan & Benzing, 2004). Liberal Arts students recognize the importance of internship participation to help aid in this transition of finding meaningful and fulfilling careers post-college.

Tori Robinson understood the importance of career planning prior to graduation because having a plan is better than trying to figure out your next steps after graduation. Tori realized very early on that they needed to participate in internships and as many as they possibly could, so that they had a direction of what was next for them. This is what Tori had to say:

I think that when you graduate you kind of get tired and you get lazy. Cause me, I've been in school my whole life maybe 16 years and I'm 22. So, to me personally, that's like my whole life. Even though I have the rest of my life ahead of me and I'm getting super stagnant, super lazy and it's just super comfortable and not having to do anything. It feels good to relax. But sometimes I think because of that internship and it's like you see how many people you helped, you can do that and you're going to do that. So, it is given me a push to, okay, keep going. You said you liked it; you said you were going to keep helping people and you doing that. So, start getting your feet wet again. Sometimes you need reminders. And the internship, that person, that internship personally for me has given me that push to keep going professionally and pursue a career in law. Because sometimes you question it like, dang, do I even want to have more college school debt and stuff like that? Or do you even want to be in school again? Because it takes a lot of discipline.

Cora Marshall believes that building up your resume helps with positioning and increases employability post college. Cora is aware of how much merit an internship adds to the resume and that these short-term commitments provide lots of opportunities for future long-term prospects:

I did just change my major, so I don't know if it was required for the major, but I just knew that it would look good on a resume having an internship. And I wanted the experience because I have always known, or for the past few years I've known I wanted to do something working with immigrants. So being able to do that and not really have any, only having responsibilities for a short amount of time with it was it made that easier to know. And it also helped me realize that I do want to go into that kind of work. So, I don't think it was required, but just having, I did it just to get the experience and to have something else to put on my resume.

Michael Johnson talked about wanting to gain real world experience in their field of interest before going to law school which is their long-term plan:

So, my goal in life was always to go to law school- complete undergrad work for a couple of years, and then go to law school. So in between going to law school and undergrad, I wanted to get some experience in the real world. So, I was thinking about lobbying, and I got the job. So that was my intention of working there, work in politics for a couple of years, and then go to law school.

From the interviews, all participants understood the importance of planning for their careers in the early stages of the college experience. At the same time, most participants had some idea of what they wanted to do for a career while in their internship. They knew the benefits of a short-term temporary commitment for satisfaction in their long-term, more permanent careers.

The themes that emerged for research question 2 are outlined in table 3 below:

Table 3. Emergent themes and sub-themes for research question 2

| <i>Research Question 2: What are their perceptions of the internship experience?</i> | | |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Theme 1 | Theme 2 | Theme 3 |
| Career Development | Career-Related Outcomes | Overall Perceptions |
| Sub-themes: | Sub-themes: | Sub-themes: |
| Skill Development | No sub-themes emerged | Positive Perceptions |
| Personal Development | | Negative Perceptions |

Research Question 2: What are their perceptions of the internship experience?

Theme 1: Career Development

Career development as an outcome helps to bridge the gaps between education and employment. It allows for the smooth transition from college to the workforce and allows students to embark on a path that equips them with the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to allow for success in their professional lives. Moreover, students should have clarity of their goals post-college, enhanced confidence in their skills, real-world experiences, and job readiness to succeed in the professional world.

Michael Johnson shared how their internship prepared them for the professional world of work and help jump start their long-term career:

So basically, I kind of got the job I wanted, fulfilling my short-term goals of what I want to do before I go on to complete my long-term professional career, which is to go to law school. So, I got the experience in the field, and I am interested in.

OG-Tosty shared their very similar yet slightly different career development outcome after completion of their internship:

As far as just the structure of what I am looking for in my long-term career, this internship structure is not a good fit for me. While there is an emerging position of environmental/ social governance within corporations because corporations are now realizing, they need these types of people. But I don't know that my professional goals align with a nine to five, a very strict corporate nine to five. Collaboration across teams is an important goal for me, but not in this type of environmental structure.

Throughout the interviews and as seen evident in the transcripts, many students are concerned with their career prospects and outcomes post-college. Within the liberal arts, emphasis on career development is to help students bridge the gap with their post-secondary outcomes, specifically helping them land the career of their choice. Many of

the participants mentioned participating in internships to gain career development and improve their employment prospects post-college.

Sub-theme 1: Skill Development

Transferable skills are essential for marketability regardless of major. When applying for jobs post-graduation, students must showcase their skills to employers to see why they are a good fit for the organization and position (Baird & Parayitam, 2019). Specifically, students must validate how their intellectual capacity, practical skill set, analytical ability, well-rounded mindset, and socially responsible nature contribute to the workforce. Liberal arts programs have merit in how it creates a holistic individual fully equipped and prepared for the rigorous tasks that await them.

Cora Marshall, a Spanish major at the time of their internship was unsure how their skills in the Spanish language translated into a career. Cora was able to use and strengthen these language skills during their internship. Here is what Cora said:

I took this internship to gain skills, gain experience. It helped me improve my Spanish a little bit because I was able to practice it and I would sometimes sit in on classes that were being done in Spanish. So academically, it improved what I was trying to learn.

Michael Johnson shared a similar experience with their skills that were developed. Michael learned skills that landed them a job in their field of interest, in addition they were able to focus and concentrate on some skills they wanted to improve:

Some of the skills I was able to tighten up were public speaking skills, making connections with people, interpersonal skills, which is the biggest, most important skill to have in this business. Just research skills mostly, which is equally important because you need to know what you're doing.

Tori Robinson knows that getting the most out of their college experience was important for their growth and skill development. Tori stayed busy by participating in

several experiential learning opportunities such as study abroad and internships. These opportunities strengthened Tori's areas of interests, thus positioning them for success post-graduation:

So, I knew it had something to do with the court. I think that word kind of persuaded me to go to the court and deal with inmates and stuff. So, I think that motivated me as well as, like I said, getting the most out of my college experience. Sometimes I, I always feel like I'm not doing enough. So, my internship put some excitement into college. It's just like, oh, I got to go to class and stuff like that. And I wasn't really that outgoing. I didn't join clubs and stuff. So, it gave me another opportunity to interact in college, and engage in stuff that's going on around and in my community. As I said, I'm a risk taker, so whether it works out or not, I'm still going to take another risk and I ended up really enjoying it.

During the interview with Michelle Green, it was clear that their internship was not what they expected. Michelle was tasked with navigating their way around an unprofessional professional setting. Because the internship lacked the qualities of a professional setting, Michelle found it difficult to quantify the benefits they got out of the experience. With some prompts, we were able to identify some good experiences and life skills from the internship experience:

I would say I guess I did gain some skills, because what I said just now is some new skills, I learned is what things to look out for when I am looking for jobs. So how do they support their employees? How do they follow through on things that they say? Now I am kind of more focused and targeted in terms of questions I ask during interviews. So outside of the negative aspects of this internship, I personally see, some skills that I got out of it.

In terms of moving into my professional things. I think, I mean, I've already felt like I am levelheaded, but with everything that was going on there, just way more practice in being professional in a non-professional, professional setting.

OG-Toasty surprised themselves with the skill set they developed during their internship:

I learned how to convince people that I know what I'm talking about. When I really talk, I already had the skill of public speaking. I very much love public speaking, but being in an environment, especially at [Corporate Organization] where I was one of the very few women and it was a very traditional environment with men, I was surprised that my manager held the position that she did because

they just talked down to her all the time. I was talked down to all the time. Being able to accurately regurgitate, information and doing that in front of a classroom, because I can do that in a climate justice course, cause I'm confident in what I'm talking about. But being able to do that even when I'm not a hundred percent confident what I'm talking about, that really surprised me. And that was something that I think has helped me move on to my work in my senior year and then graduate school. Now I'm sitting here talking about a thesis and I don't know all the information yet, but I can say it convincingly enough and I can answer questions about it.

Jackson Jackson had an opportunity to identify and develop skills in the workplace during their internship:

I was doing so much at the time; it gave me a lot of time management skills. Specifically, I learned how to juggle my own life with my work life. So even though my experience was not the best, I would still do another internship. If a student is really confused, I think it's great to get work experience, to meet other people and learn different things that you can't learn in a classroom.

Yeah, so I thought I was going to have more technical knowledge of what it means if there are this many cars on the highway, how much pollution does that create? And things like that. I thought that my knowledge was going to have to be very technical and specific and scientific-based, or even thinking about the social impacts of environmental disasters. But it was more about me talking to the volunteers who were signed up on their volunteer list and telling them about the campaigns and the politicians that the organization was endorsing and informing them about different policies. So, it was less technical knowledge and more about communication and listening and talking to people. I took a lot from that experience. But I think that if my goal was to just have more direction and gain some experience, then yeah, I met my expectations.

During the interviews, it was evident that all participants realized the importance of earning work-related skills during their internship and how it would help make them attractive candidates to their employers. The participants talked about identifying skills they did not know they already possessed. Many of them could concentrate on strengthening skills, and some talked about the new skills they learned. Overall, from the interviews, the participants found meaningful benefits from their internships.

Sub-theme 2: Personal Development

As stated in Chapter 2, students who participate in internships have their career interests become more refined because they gain first-hand experience in a professional industry where they can expand their knowledge of that industry through exploration (Hoekstra, 2021). This allows students to clarify their career aspirations and interests. Often, students get to participate in the industry before having to commit. These experiences offer valuable perspectives for students, especially if they are unclear on the career direction they want to pursue (Hoekstra, 2021).

Michael Johnson talked about putting themselves out there by reaching out to an internship site to ask them for an internship. They were willing to do whatever work they had. Michael shared this conversation that they had with the internship site:

“Hey, I’ll work for you.” And they asked me what I wanted to do, and I said, just give me work. I don’t remember exactly what her conversation was, but well, through Zoom, she said, as an intern, you would be helping our lawyers to have two lawyers with drafting bills, which was read in front of city council, drafting testimonies, doing research. So, it was mainly research. That’s what I did. I did less of the lobbying work for my first part, but I did do the lobbying for the second part of my semester for of my internship. I drafted legislation and which became bills in the end and did research for our clients, which helped facilitate conversations between elected officials and our clients. What else did I do? Spreadsheets. So, it was money because most of our clients did money, federal funding. So, I would do on how much money was being appropriated for the fiscal year. And yeah, it was just spreadsheets and just money that our clients needed and how much money we can negotiate from the elected officials.

Tori Robinson’s internship experience as the only Black person at their internship site, provided some safety and surety for the clients. During their interview Tori opened about how their voice provided a sense of safety and security for the clients they worked with. Additionally, Tori shared how this provided them with personal edification and confidence in what they could offer to their clients during the internship:

I was in a courtroom, I was back and forth to the courtroom and office, and I had barely seen black people, whether it's females or male or especially in my unit. So, it's like, okay, it's a need for them. And sometimes my clients, they would be easier going once they heard my voice and my tone because sometimes you can tell when people's backgrounds when you talk to them or just, they get more comfortable and not so aggressive once they talk to me. So, I think it's important as well. They have different representations.

OG-Toasty ventured into a field that they had a budding interest in. OG was testing their skill set to see how they matched up with other people pursuing degrees in the same field. Overall, OG-Toasty said they wanted to push themselves to see how competitive they were and how they could match up to other interns:

Well, yeah, I met my personal goal in the sense of I completed an internship. That was one, I completed the internship and that's what I wanted for myself. I wanted experience. It also met my goals of making money. It made my parents happy. It was always a goal of mine, of just making sure my parents are proud of me, which they always are. But those, there's always that extra portion of you just want them to really be proud of you because my sister had never completed any internship. So, I was the first one. And like I said, it just helped me figure out what I wanted to do. And it helped me form relationships with people who can speak very positively on my behalf because I know I can go back to that environmental manager and say, hey, could you be a reference for me for another internship? And I know she'd say, absolutely. So, if in thinking back to that time, if those were the goals I had, and I do believe I met them.

Yeah. I think the expectations with any of my internships, I mean, the basic expectation was always just like to show up and do what you're given and meet the goals of the team, meet the goals of the department, be able to work with people who don't have the same background as you. Be able to work under a manager, be able to solve possible conflict, being able to adapt to sudden changes, being in a competitive environment, a very fluctuating environment. I think my personal expectation was essentially just learning.

Personal development comes in many forms. Students can gain personal development by becoming confident in their skill sets. Confident in the information that they know. Additionally, it can come in the form of a career. A student could develop confidence in their chosen industry, knowing their skills align with that industry and that they are a good fit.

Theme 2: Career-related Outcomes

Studies provide evidence of the beneficial impact of experiential learning on career-related achievements among college graduates. Those students who complete internships during their academic journey have a higher likelihood of securing employment upon graduation compared to those who do not have such internship experience (Saltikoff, 2017). Career-related outcomes result from an individual's work-related activities, decisions, and professional efforts. These outcomes usually refer to evaluating and measuring the success, progress, and fulfillment of one's career path. Career-related outcomes can be tangible and intangible, and they vary depending on the specific context and goals of the individual. In this section, career-related outcomes refer to the professional outcomes' students gained from their internship experience.

Michael Johnson career related outcomes is that they were offered a full-time position after graduation:

I got a job. This internship provided practical experience, mentorship, job shadowing with people who have experience in the field. So, I've always wanted to do an internship, and I did, and it helped me get a job here after college. So just networking and putting yourself out there will help you in the future.

Tori Robinson believed that internships act as a bridge to connect your interest to the actual career experience. Tori believed that participating in the internship would make it easy for them to get a job after graduation:

Honestly, I thought that I would, because I had an internship, it would be like, okay, I can easily get a job at the internship site, but that's not the case. So, it kind of taught me something in a sense. An internship does not guarantee a job. But I don't really get too discouraged. Sometimes if you don't have an internship, you have no direction when you are out of college. I really don't know what I'm going to do. I'm just applying for anything. And that's how people end up working at jobs that don't have anything to do with their major. So having the field narrowed down so that the search is easier to figure out what you really want to do, or this is what I want to do for the time being until something else piques my interest.

Cora Marshall is now going into their fourth year of college. While Cora does not have post-graduation outcomes, they have an idea of what is next for them after they complete their final year of college:

So overall, I think internships are important. I think they should be required because it makes the thought of going into a career after you graduate a little less scary knowing that you've done something like it. It's normal to be nervous about a new opportunity like that, but I didn't know what to expect. And sometimes when I was doing things that were so new to me, I was nervous about it and didn't think I could do it, but then I gained that confidence from the experience. So, it might be hard on the moment, but it's worth it.

I think they are a really good experience to have. Mine specifically was good for me because like I said, it was the type of work I want to go into. And I think I already said this, but especially figuring out if that is the type of work you want to go into. Because you're never going to know if you're really going to enjoy something if you don't have that practice first. And it's a really good experience to be able to see other people who know what they're doing in that job and being able to shadow them or follow them and get advice from them.

While OG-Toasty went a different route professionally after their internship, they felt like it added to the post-college outcome. OG was able to make a decision that made all potential parties happy. OG-Toasty specifically talked about appealing to their parents' concerns about their post-college outcomes:

I'm never going to work at a, I mean, I don't want to say never because there is the emerging position of environmental social governance or whatever in corporations, because corporations are now realizing crap, we need these types of people.

But I don't know, my professional goals do not align with a nine to five. And I mean, being able to collaborate with people who don't have the same background as you. Being able to collaborate with other managers, being able to collaborate with other departments, I mean, that's a very important goal to have for your professional career. And I felt like I did learn that at [Corporate Organization]. But as far as just the structure of what I look for in my professional career, not going to be that.

I was like I don't want to do this. So, I started searching for graduate schools. I know I didn't want to pay for graduate school. So, I started looking to see if there

are any places that have a funded master's degree. I chose to go to graduate school.

It was evident through the interviews that participants recognized and pointed out the benefits of participating in internships. However, because of where some participants are in their college careers, there was some skewness in ideas of the long-term benefits of internships. Although the benefits of internships might not be visible, the consensus on internships is positive. Moreover, some participants discussed the connections they made and how those connections could pan out in the future. Undoubtedly, some positive outcomes were leveraged through the connections where a few participants landed full-time roles after their internships.

Theme 3: Overall Perceptions

The overall perceptions of internships by students who participate in them vary widely. Specifically, individuals overall experience will determine their perceptions of how internships help or hinder their career prospects. Overall, students are aware that internships offer valuable learning opportunities, enhance personal and professional development, networking opportunities and provide them with insights into the company/organization they aim to pursue for a future career. As seen in chapter 2, there are many positive student outcomes that come from participation in internships. However, the experience during that internship could potentially shape students' perceptions of the opportunity.

Tori Robinson's shared their overall perception of internships:

I feel like internships are good because it's going to teach you what the classroom isn't. A lot of times when you're in a classroom, the stuff that you learn about is material that's been taught for forever. You never know when they changed the curriculum of what you're learning. So, when you're in an internship, it gives you the chance to handle what you're learning in class but updated. Because the world

is constantly changing, when you do internships, you get the perspective. You can mix the material that you learn with stuff that's going on every single day. I think that's one of the big benefits of internships. I also like that they are flexible, most internships, they understand that you're a student and they work with your schedule.

Jackson Jackson's overall perceptions of internships:

Internships, they're good opportunities. It helped me figure out where I wanted to go and what things I was good at. I would do another internship because there's nothing stopping me. And if a student is really confused, I think it's always great for them to try an internship and not only to get work experience, but to meet other people and learn different things that you may not know otherwise and that you can't learn in a classroom.

The consensus of participants was in favor of participating in internships. Since all participants, themselves had participated in one or more internships, they highly encouraged others to participate in them.

Sub-Theme 1: Positive Perceptions

The positive consensus of participating in internships are outlined by participants below.

OG-Toasty's positive perception of internships:

I think for indecisive people or people who have no idea what they want to do, especially in an academic setting, internship experiences are a great way to see how you can apply your skills and how life is going to be in the real world.

I think internships are wonderful things, and I like that corporations are finally acknowledging the importance of having interns for the benefit of the company, but also for the benefit of the student. And I hope one day all internships can be paid and we don't have to worry about anyone being unpaid in reinforcing the socioeconomic divide between classes. But I love internships and I'm just happy to come and talk about it.

Cora Marshall's positive perceptions of internships:

I think internships are a really good experience to have. My experience was good for me because it was the type of work I want to go into. Figuring out if that is the type of work I wanted to go into after graduation is essential because you're never going to know if you're really going to enjoy something if you don't have that practice first.

One more thing. I do think it's good to have the resources that my institution has for the internships, the internship class and the career center. I'm not sure exactly what, but even though I didn't use those, it was nice to know that it was there if I needed it. Also, I want to say, that this internship was not really something specific to my major since I was studying Spanish. So even branching out and doing an internship and something that you're just interested in and maybe could see yourself doing in the future, even if it's not specifically within your major.

Jackson Jackson's positive perceptions of internships:

Internships are a good opportunity because it helped me figure out where I wanted to go and what things I was good at in the workspace. Because I was doing so much at the time, it gave me a lot of time management skills. I would say learning how to juggle my own life, and this experience helped me learn time management skills in my work life.

Sub-Theme 2: Negative Perceptions

While the consensus on internships was positive, some nuances in internship experience by participants were uncovered. Although many participants saw the benefits of completing internships, here is what they shared about their thoughts on the negative aspects of internships.

Michelle Green shared how their experiences as a first generation, poor college student played a vital role in their views of internships. Specifically, Michelle believes that internships are good, but that they are mostly reserved for students who have financial support from family members and do not need to work to provide for themselves:

I just feel like internships are built for people that have the time and have the money. And if I'm focused on school and my loans and all the other things that happen as being a first-generation person of color at a PWI and a poor student, I'm not worried about going in an internship because it feels like I'm just giving my time away when there could be other things that I'm doing. If I'm really in need of money, those hours are going towards a job, not me getting more experience. I'm going to be more focused on being able to support myself while I'm in college, not giving away my time for internships.

Calvin Fisher shared a very similar sentiment. Overall, they believe in internships, but also believe they should be paid. Calvin thought internships kind of hinder those students who need to work to earn money. Specifically, because they must choose between participating in an unpaid internship or working to earn wages to support themselves:

I think internships are silly or think that it's absurd that we've constructed an economic system that requires unpaid labor from folks who, in any other developed country on the planet are paid to learn and to train themselves and become more productive members of society and bring in those lucrative tax dollars to their governments. Having an internship is an advantage just because the deck is so damn stacked against you in every other case, I wish we didn't have to have them. I wish there were more robust training methods for everything.

I mean, like I said, I wish they were paid. I think the topmost level view of an internship is it helps you find the thing that you want to do, what you want to make out of your professional life is good and important and super useful. It's hard to get there. If it's unpaid, it's hard to do, or it's hard to do that if there's a paywall. In an ideal situation, everyone would do a lot of them, and it would be, you'd get a much better sense of what you want to do.

Plenty of folks my age and younger have this thing, if they're done college and they're in a job, they don't realize that they can get a better one because they just don't know the lay of the land. And changing your employment is stressful. So, it worked out really, well for me, and I did it in a very, very non-traditional way.

While the study was focused primarily on what motivates liberal arts students to complete internships for academic credit, there are so many aspects this study could have focused on; however, this is a baseline for this research, and from this study, we can see that there are so many other angles that need to be explored when thinking about internships and how they benefit students. For example, a broader conversation is needed about whether internships should be required in the Liberal Arts. A few participants think that they should be.

Michael Johnson had some advice to share on why internships should be included in the academic curriculum within at their institution. Here is what Michael added:

I think they are very important, and every student must do an internship. It's just going to help them at the end of the day, find out what they want to do later in life, because a lot of students are confused. They don't have a goal. So doing an internship would provide clarity and the student will probably even end up liking what they do. So, I think internships should be mandatory for liberal arts students, maybe try to institute a mandatory internship thing for a couple of years and see how students react to it and see whether they end up getting job offers after graduation.

Similarly, Tori Robinson suggested internships should be a mandatory part of the college experience. They stated:

Everyone should do an internship, words from Tory's mouth to you all get an internship.

It shouldn't just be from junior to senior. It should be offered for freshman and sophomore too. I understand they might not be that mature, but at that time we're worried about other things as well as job, graduation, capstones, and stuff like that. So sometimes waiting until the end is just like, that's probably why they don't do internships either. They have bigger things to focus on. So, kind of opening it up to freshman and sophomore might be helpful as well. You never know, but junior and senior is just like, you focus on all that stuff as well.

While internships are not required, perceptions of them are merely positive.

Although this is a small number of students, the overall perceptions sheds light on why internships should be seriously considered to be added to the curriculum.

Chapter Summary

During all the individual interviews, each participant shared information about the positive aspects of their internship experiences and their overall perceptions of internships. The participants discussed the importance of gaining experience in a field of interest and spending time on a temporary assignment before they move on to permanent employment post-graduation. Participants could recall specific details from their internship experiences that helped them with their personal and professional goals. Some

benefits participants mentioned were that they secured full-time employment post-graduation, which can be found in Table 1.

Overall, participants detailed the benefits and challenges of their internship experiences, and the researcher was able to draw similarities and differences from their experiences. Although most participants had positive things to say about their experiences, some negative aspects were also brought up. Despite some challenges, participants still believed that it is beneficial for all students in the liberal arts college to complete internships. They mentioned that internships are great ways to find out what they want to do long-term while gaining practical hands-on experience outside the classroom. Lastly, all participants talked about how they valued the overall experience, the advice from mentors and supervisors, the knowledge they gained, the skills they tightened and developed, and the opportunity to participate in an internship. They acknowledged that the ability to participate in internships during college can be a privilege for many but not for all.

Chapter Five includes a summary and detailed discussion of the findings in chapter four. It will also cover the limitation of the study, its implications, and recommendations for future practice and research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose of the Study

The research study presented in this dissertation focused on exploring reasons that led liberal arts students to undertake internships for academic credit, their experiences with the internships, and their perceptions of their usefulness and impact on their future careers. The study draws from prior research and theories, primarily on those of John Dewey's (1938) learning model and David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. Before the data collection process, various scholarly articles and research studies on internships were reviewed, showing that roughly seventy-five percent of post-secondary students complete at least one internship by graduation (Rothberg, 2015). This number has risen from roughly one in thirty-six graduates who completed internships in the 1980s (Coco, 2000). Although generally, internships have shown significant benefits for students, such as increased employability, higher job prospects, and reduced time searching for full-time employment after graduation (Sanahuja et al., 2015), the reviewed literature showed issues of access to internships for low-income students (Hora et al., 2019), as well as potential exploitation in unpaid internships (Durrant, 2013).

Overview of Methods

The research methodology used a case study approach (Tellis, 1997) to conduct research within a liberal arts college that is one of 17 schools and colleges at a large urban public university in the northeast. The researcher received IRB approval in March 2023, then followed a meticulous six-step data collection and analysis plan. Recruitment started in late March with targeted emails sent to students who completed an internship

course in the Fall and Spring of 2022. Recruitment emails included a link to a short demographic survey to determine eligibility. Once eligibility was determined, in April 2023, based on the rigorous criteria detailed in Chapter 3, the researcher approached seven students for a 60-minute semi-structured virtual interview to collect data.

After the interviews, the researcher entered the recorded transcripts into Rev.com for transcription. Transcriptions were completed and returned to the researcher within 24 hours. The researcher then read and re-read the transcripts while listening to recordings to ensure accuracy. Data triangulation through member checking was initiated in mid-April. Transcripts were cleaned and sent to participants to be verified and ensure accuracy. Then, the researcher started the process of coding.

The researcher utilized an inductive coding methodology to make sense of the interviews, which were done in several steps. The first step was the researcher to become familiar with the data. This method included reading and re-reading the raw data in each transcript line by line to make sense of the information. The second step included generating the raw codes. This method included creating codes in the margins of each transcript in Atlas.ti. Since Atlas.ti allows multiple levels of coding, the researcher was able to create codes, revisit those codes to add new ones, and replace old ones. The third step was to create the coding dictionary then. The researcher moved all codes out of Atlas.ti into one document where they were displayed together for review. After the dictionary was created, the themes were defined.

Summary of Findings

Through the interviews, the researcher found several reasons students opted to complete internships. These motivations ranged from gaining practical hands-on

experience to receiving career guidance and earning academic credits. The participants discussed in great detail how completing an internship for academic credit freed up their schedules to do other things and accomplish their goals as discussed below.

Overall, the benefits of internships were seen in helping students, especially those in the liberal arts, gain experience and develop an idea about their future career paths. This research provides insight into the motivations and experiences of liberal arts students completing internships for academic credit and the potential impact on their future careers.

Discussion of Findings

The research questions guiding this study were:

(1) What motivates liberal arts students to elect to complete an internship for credit?

(2) What are their perceptions of the internship experience?

These questions led to the following findings that will add to our knowledge on this topic, as discussed below. The analysis of the research interview transcripts revealed four main themes with subthemes. The emergent themes included the below themes and sub-themes for research question 1:

Table 4. Themes and subthemes

| Themes | Subthemes | R1 | R2 |
|--|---|----|----|
| Academic credit as an incentive | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduction of Academic Stress• Alternative to not Receiving Payments for the Internship Opportunity | X | |
| Career clarification through internships | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exploring Interest and Career Paths• Navigating Uncertainty around Career Choices | X | |
| Career Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning and Personal Growth• Career Planning• Skill Development• Personal Development | X | X |
| Career-Related Outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No subthemes emerged | | X |
| Overall Perceptions | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive Perceptions• Negative Perceptions | | X |

Research question #1: What motivates liberal arts students to elect to complete an internship for credit?

This research study sought to understand the motivation behind liberal arts students electing to complete an internship for academic credit, especially since they are not required. This study's semi-structured qualitative interviews provided valuable insights into why liberal arts students opt to complete internships for academic credit. The researcher has identified several reasons students are motivated to complete internships, including some participants were motivated to participate in internships because they **could** earn academic credits. Other participants talked about earning academic credit as an excellent alternative to not being paid. Otherwise, they felt like they were only involved in a volunteer work.

Moreover, some participants discussed how they took advantage of earning academic credit because it helped them reduce their workload for the semester. Specifically, it allowed them to avoid taking additional classes, thus causing further academic stress. Another participant talked about how participating in an internship freed up space in their academic plan, and they were able to add a minor. At the same time, others are motivated and interested in gaining practical, hands-on experience and insights into future career paths.

The findings of this study enhance our understanding of the significance of academic credit in boosting the internship experience for liberal arts students. Based on the literature in Chapter 2, studies have shown improvement in students' academic performance because of internship completion (Schambach & Dirks, 2002). Additionally, since more than half of the available internships are unpaid, higher education institutions offer students credits that help count towards their graduation requirements to validate the significance of the students earning academic credit (Zehr, 2016). Academic credit attachment reduces academic stress for students, providing them with a sense of accomplishment and motivation throughout their journey. Gaining this perspective from student participants adds valuable insights into how academic institutions can utilize internship participation as an extension of classroom learning to build student personal and professional growth.

Moreover, this study highlights the specific skills and knowledge students acquire from credit-bearing internships, specifically, the direct applicability to the student's academic and future professional pursuits. It is through this thorough look at the associated benefits of academic credit in internship participation that this research

expands our understanding of the nuanced dynamics between education and experiential learning. Thus, ultimately informing us about a more knowledgeable approach when working on curriculum development and career preparation for liberal arts students.

Research question #2: What are their perceptions of the internship experience?

The participants interviewed revealed that their perceptions of internships were that they are pivotal to their educational experience, especially in the liberal arts. Among participants, there was a consensus that all students should participate in an internship regardless of whether it is a requirement. Participants found that participation in internships helped them professionally, personally, and academically. Specifically, they talked about all the uncertainty that surrounded career prospects for liberal arts students and how internships helped them clarify their prospective career field and the specific career type. Other participants mentioned how internships helped them define what they wanted to pursue as a major because when they started their internship, they were undecided about their major. Lastly, all participants' perceptions of the internship experience were that it helped them build confidence in their professionalism, communication, critical thinking, and other relevant skills.

These findings are consistent with the literature on student benefits of internships. Research shows that internships help bridge the gap for students entering the labor market by providing them with hands-on experience to apply their classroom knowledge (Sanahuja et al., 2015). While these values are documented by scholars, employers, and higher education institutions, they need student perspectives. Hence, this student inquiry is needed (Hugdon, 2016; Tymon, 2013). Much of the research is primarily employer-

centered, so this research adds student insights into the perceived benefits of internships on their overall career outcomes.

We have additional support that internships are critical in clarifying the participants' career goals and reducing the confusion and uncertainty regarding their career paths after graduation. To this end, internships offer a unique opportunity for students to explore their interests, understand the qualifications required for various professions, and evaluate different career pathways. It was also reported that internships help participants to explore the professional world beyond academic studies. Although the benefits of internships may not be immediately visible to the students who undertook them, the consensus among the participants was that they are primarily beneficial. Many advocated that internships be universally included in the curriculum at their institution.

The findings of this study have also revealed that internships play a significant role in skill-building and personal growth. Through internships, students can identify their existing skills, refine them, and learn new ones, making them stand out to potential employers. Internships also enable students to make connections within their chosen industry. Despite the positive aspects of internships, participants also detailed various challenges. For example, the lack of financial compensation for their work and the time commitment required were potential barriers to the accessibility of many internships. Some participants felt that internships catering only to students with external support result in an inequitable system, where those who have to work to sustain themselves are at a significant disadvantage.

In summary, the findings of this study support much of the literature on the benefits of internships. Through the interviews, participants shared that internships are

essential to their experiential learning and crucial for career development. With the increasing competition in the job market, employers are seeking candidates with practical knowledge and skills. Internships allow students to gain knowledge and skills, making them more attractive to potential employers. Moreover, internships enable participants to develop a sense of professionalism and work ethic, which is essential for success in any career. Through internships, students learn the importance of punctuality, time management, and teamwork, among other essential skills.

This study suggests that institutions and employers work together to create more accessible and beneficial internship opportunities. Specifically, career services should collaborate closely with employers to ensure that the internships align well with the educational curriculum and contribute effectively to students' academic and professional growth. Additionally, institutions should expand support resources that help students navigate the internship search process and ensure that internships are accessible to all students, regardless of their socioeconomic and financial background.

Recommendations

Implications for Theory

This research utilized the experiential learning theories of David Kolb and John Dewey to focus on how learning occurs in the internship environment. The findings indicate that the social environment (internship site) allowed learning. Specifically, the location of the internship site played a significant role in allowing the participants to learn during their internship. Elements of learning also included those of building skills outside of the classroom and in the professional world. However, because the elements of the theoretical frameworks focused primarily on learning and how it occurs in the

environment, this theory did not allow for capturing nuances of internship experiences by each participant.

The researcher recommends using updated theories such as expectancy-value, social cognitive theory, self-determination theory, interest theory, achievement goal theory, and attribution theory. They align more with understanding the academic motivation of students. Using modern theories to measure student academic motivation could better understand student self-efficacy, their choices to participate in internships, their persistence in completing their internships, and their resiliency throughout the difficulties of their experience.

Researchers can better understand student motivation to participate in internships by using relevant theories. Theories could provide insight into our comprehension of the research issue while increasing the credibility of the findings. Furthermore, it could guide the study's design, including the research questions, providing interpretation and understanding of the data (Wigfield & Koenka, 2020).

Recommendations for Future Research

This research project aimed to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the voices and perspectives of liberal arts students on what they consider to be the benefits of completing an internship. Despite the rich insights gained from this study, there is still room for improvement in research design and methodology.

The researcher believes that expanding the design of this project will help future research on this topic. Since this study focused on recruiting students enrolled in the internship course for the Fall and Spring of 2022, the targeted number of participants was to produce a small case study. Scaling the study to include other internship courses within

the institution to increase the size, participant number, and sample diversity. To elicit richer contributions to the findings, it would help to extend the sample size for future research to include more participants from varying socioeconomic backgrounds to capture a more comprehensive picture. Further inquiry into the perceived inadequacies of internship experiences could also be conducted. Researchers should explore the experiences of students who may need to work to support themselves, with a focus on understanding the full extent of these barriers to participation and identifying ways to overcome them, including the involvement of in-depth interviews with students and employers to gain a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by these individuals.

Additionally, conducting a comparative study across disciplines will add to the study design. It is also recommended that a study across institutions (a stand-alone liberal arts college vs. a liberal arts college housed within a larger university) be conducted because student perceptions at institutions that prioritize internships might differ from those where internships are not prioritized. For example, other institutions have incorporated ways to assist their students who take on unpaid internships. They increased their need-based financial aid and replaced traditional loans with grants to offer supplemental support to socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Yagoda, 2008). Also, student motivations at institutions where all internships are paid may vary.

Moreover, research between specific disciplines (liberal arts vs. business) might yield useful results for future studies; as Michael Johnson mentioned, “In [the liberal arts college], you must complete an internship because it is not like the School of Business. As an accounting or finance major, students are much more likely to get a job related to

that field, especially if they are in computer science.” Consequently, it might be good to see if students in the business school share the same perceptions as others not in the school of business.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies could be conducted to explore the long-term implications of internships on students' professional trajectories. Such studies could provide valuable insights into how the perceived benefits of internships for college students translate to outcomes post-graduation. A longitudinal study could also garner insight into the changes in perceptions over time, with the follow-up post-graduation and into the professional world after leaving the academic sphere, including tracking students over several years to better understand how their internships have impacted their careers and professional development.

Lastly, an area for future research could incorporate a study into student understanding of the job market, its current climate, and how it impacts motivation. While students participate in internships to ensure the field is a good fit for them. Inquiry into a match between the student and the organization with an understanding of the characteristics and motivation of job satisfaction, fit, and work values is essential to understanding the current climate and how it affects students' career choices.

Regarding the methodology, the researcher recommends that future studies use different methodological approaches. While the interviews uncovered lots of rich data, adding in-the-field observations could add value to future research. By conducting observations in the field, the researcher will be able to shadow participants at their internship site and see firsthand the workplace interactions in the natural environment. Within qualitative research methodologies, observations have been used for several years

(Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018). This methodological approach entails deliberately gathering data using the researcher's senses. The researcher believes that field observations emphasizing attentive listening and visual perceptions (Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018) could yield meaningful conclusions about participants' motivations and interpretations of the duties and responsibilities required for the specific role.

Additionally, while interviews are a fundamental qualitative methodology, focus groups provide a highly targeted and comprehensive approach to group interviews with interactive discussions. They enable the interviewer to facilitate a well-structured and organized conversation centered on the topic under exploration (Gundumogula & Gundumogula, 2020). Using a focus group where participants can interact with each other and share similar perceptions, benefits, and experiences could add to future research on this topic. Although participants will share differences in their experiences, some commonalities can be drawn from similarities among benefits and overall perceptions. Participation in a focus group could provide a sense of community for participants where they draw from each other's experiences. Including a focus group in addition to other qualitative methodologies is recommended because it can help extend, enrich, or confirm understanding and provide further insights (Gill & Baillie, 2018). While it is vital to draw rich data from individual interviews because of the social interactions often displayed in group settings, gathering participants to obtain more profound insights that could add to the data collection would be interesting.

Lastly, consideration for a mixed-method study is encouraged. Mixed methods studies offer a valuable and comprehensive, well-rounded perspective for research because of its ability to gather information from different sources and bring it together to

create an efficient design (Almalki, 2016). Moreover, by combining the two methodological approaches, mixed methods research offers positive benefits to research inquiries. It allows the researcher to delve into the nuances of the topic and capture the broader trends.

Recommendations for Practice

Future research aims to further contribute to the practice that supports participation in internships for students within the liberal arts college. Due to the researcher's role as an employee in the professional development office, this research enhanced their understanding of student engagement and participation in internships. The researcher can incorporate the learned knowledge into practice when coaching students on internship participation and leading the internship course. These recommendations are newly developed ideas, as they have not been mentioned throughout the literature.

One significant area for improvement is for the liberal arts college to work towards bridging the gap between the need for practical experiences through internships and the inability of some students to meet the associated expenses and time commitments.

Additionally, the liberal arts college should focus on improvement in the provision of support resources available for students when navigating the internship-seeking process. This might include adding specialized workshops on identifying and applying for internships, professional networking, interview skills, and writing professional emails and cover letters. Also, supporting students throughout their internship experience with regular check-ins and structured feedback mechanisms can enhance the value of their experience.

Another recommendation for practice is creating flexible internship models that align with accommodating students' academic plans and schedules to help with these challenges. For example, internships could be built into student plans, so they are not required to choose between adding an internship and other commitments. This will enable students to participate without disrupting their academic schedules, thus leading to more inclusive and equitable opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds. Based on student responses during the interviews, they seem receptive to integrating mandatory internships into the college curriculum. However, some provisional accommodations must be implemented to create equity and ensure that some students are not unfairly disadvantaged.

Lastly, it is also important to highlight that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to internships. While they provide valuable experiences and skills, there may be better fits for some students. For example, some students may have other commitments that make it challenging to participate in internships or prefer to gain experience through other means. Therefore, the institution should provide various options for students to gain practical experience and develop skills.

Overall, internships are a valuable opportunity for students to gain practical experience, develop essential skills, explore career options, and build professional networks. By providing accessible and beneficial internship opportunities, universities and employers can help students prepare for successful careers and contribute to a more skilled and diverse workforce. However, challenges such as lack of financial compensation and time commitment can hinder some students from participating in internships. To address these challenges, universities and employers must work together

to create more accessible and beneficial internship opportunities and provide support resources to help students navigate the internship search process. Moreover, thorough research is needed to assess the broader implications of internships and to explore ways to make them more accessible to students from diverse backgrounds. By doing so, we can ensure that internships continue to be an essential component of a student's education, providing them with valuable experiences and skills that will benefit them throughout their careers.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of internships and their positive impact on liberal arts students. Internships offer a unique opportunity for collegegoers to gain practical skills, clarify career goals, and experience professional growth. They provide a safe space for students to refine their interests and gain deeper insights into their chosen fields. Moreover, internships are an excellent way for students to expand their professional networks and understand the real-world practicalities of their future careers. They can have numerous career-related outcomes that benefit students in the long run. For example, internships can help students build resumes and gain valuable work experience before graduation. This can give them a competitive edge over other job applicants and increase their chances of landing their dream job. Additionally, internships can help students develop essential skills such as communication, problem-solving, and time management, which employers highly value.

However, participating in internships can be challenging due to the required time commitments. Furthermore, because many internships in the Liberal Arts are unpaid, this poses a significant burden for students who need to support themselves financially.

Despite these challenges, the benefits of participating in internships make them a worthwhile endeavor for students when considering their careers. To alleviate some of these challenges, institutions and employers need to collaborate by creating accessible internship opportunities. This can include offering paid internships, stipends and allowances where needed, and flexible scheduling options for internships.

Additionally, universities can expand the resources that support helping students navigate the internship search process, including resume reviews, interview preparation, and networking events. Another important consideration is the impact of internships on career development. Internships can expose students to real-world problems, practical skills, and clarity in their career choices. Internship experiences can also lead to personal growth and confidence building. However, it is crucial to recognize that internships may only sometimes lead to immediate career outcomes, and the benefits may take time to determine. It is vital for students to approach internships with a long-term perspective and to see them as part of a larger career development plan.

Furthermore, internships can be a way for students to build their professional networks. Through their work as interns, students could connect with professionals in their field of interest who can provide valuable guidance and advice. These connections can also lead to future job opportunities or references. It is essential to highlight the benefits of building a professional network in college so that these relationships blossom over time, allowing students to lean on their network when seeking career opportunities. Also, it is crucial to recognize that internships are not a one-size-fits-all solution. While they can provide valuable experiences and skills, there may be better fits for some students. For example, some students may have other commitments that make it

challenging to participate in an internship or prefer to gain experience through other means. Institutions and employers must provide various options for students to gain practical experience and develop skills. While explicitly focusing on expanding internship options so it can accommodate all students regardless of their discipline, area of interest, and previous experience.

Despite these challenges, the perceived benefits of internships outweigh the short-term drawbacks. It is crucial to ensure that these opportunities remain accessible to all students, regardless of their financial circumstances. Educational institutions should seek to balance the benefits of internships against the potential pitfalls, continuously reassessing their internship programs to avoid exploitation and ensure equitable access for all students. By doing so, we can ensure that internships continue to be an essential component of a student's education, providing them with valuable experiences and skills that will benefit them throughout their careers.

In conclusion, internships are a valuable opportunity for students to gain practical experience, develop essential skills, and explore career options. While they may present challenges, the benefits of participating in internships make them worthwhile for students committed to building successful careers. Higher education institutions and employers can work together to create more accessible and beneficial internship opportunities, ultimately leading to better student and employer outcomes. Moreover, internships are also a way for students to gain exposure to various industries and roles they may have yet to consider. This can be especially beneficial for students still deciding on a career path or interested in exploring different options. Internships can provide a low-risk way for

students to test out different career paths, gain new experiences, and make informed decisions about their future.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO STUDENTS

Dear Students:

Since you were enrolled in an internship course and completed an internship in Spring 2022 or Fall 2022. Would you like to participate in a short research study?

This study is part of a dissertation research project that is investigating liberal arts students' perceptions of internship experiences.

I am seeking volunteers to participate in a survey and be interviewed about your internship experiences to better understand aspects of the overall experience.

Interviews will be no longer than 60 minutes with the possibility of a brief follow-up (15-30 minute) if needed for member checking after initial data collection.

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. The transcript of your audio recording will be de-identified before analysis. Your name will not be used in any reports or presentations related to this study. Non-participation has no bearing on your academic standing.

If you are interested in participating, please click [here](#) to complete a short form to determine if you qualify for inclusion. You may also contact me at carissa.forde@temple.edu to enroll or ask questions.

Thank you for your time.

Carissa Forde

APPENDIX B: SAMPLING GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

| Criteria | Target | Recruited to Date |
|--|--------------|-------------------|
| Completed internship course in Fall or Spring 2022 | 6-8 students | |
| Completed a paid internship for credit | 3-4 students | |
| Completed an unpaid internship for credit | 3-4 students | |

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SCREENING TOOL

Please complete the survey below:

Last Name- TEXT

First Name- TEXT

Email Address- TEXT

What is your TUID number?

What is your current year in school-

- First year student/Freshman
- Second year student/Sophomore
- Third year student/Junior
- Fourth year student/Senior

What is your major- TEXT

What gender best describes you?

- Woman
- Man
- Transgender
- Gender non-binary
- Agender
- Prefer not to answer

What race best describes you? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY

- Black (e.g., Afro American, Afro Latinx, Afro Caribbean, Afro Asian, etc.)
- White
- American India or Alaskan Native
- East Asian
- South Asian
- Southeast Asian
- Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian
- Indo-Caribbean

Are you of Hispanic or Latinx Origin?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer Not to Answer

Did you complete internship course and an internship between Spring 2022 and Fall 2022?

- Yes
- No

If yes, where did you complete your internship? TEXT

Were you paid for your internship?

- Yes
- No

Availability (Please write all dates and times you are available for a 60- minute interview)

(E.g., Mondays at lunchtime, Tuesday evenings, etc.)- TEXT

APPENDIX D: EMAIL CONFIRMATION OF PARTICIPATION

Dear XXX,

Thank you so much for expressing interest in participating in the research project. Based on your responses you are eligible to participate.

Based on your availability, I can schedule you for an interview on **DATE**. Please read the instructions completely, then reply to this email to confirm your interest in participating on **DATE**. **If this date is no longer convenient, we can find a mutually convenient time for your interview to be scheduled.**

Interviews will be held on Zoom at **the agreed-upon time**. No need to prepare or review materials beforehand. All instructions will be explained at the interview.

I look forward to seeing you online on **DATE**. If you have any questions beforehand, please contact me via email at Carissa.forde@temple.edu. If you need to reschedule your interview or withdraw your participation, please contact me as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time.

Carissa

APPENDIX E: EMAIL OF INELIGIBILITY TO PARTICIPATE

Dear XXX:

Thank you so much for expressing interest in participating in this study. Based on your responses you are not eligible to participate.

Thank you for your time.

Carissa

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Summary

This interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting thoughts, ideas, and information shared by participants. This entire process is confidential. Your names will not appear in any reports or presentations related to this research's findings. This interview should take no more than 60 minutes. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, please respond truthfully and to the best of your knowledge and recollection.

Interview Script

Thank you so much for taking the time to share your internship experience. My name is Carissa Forde, and I am a doctoral candidate in the EdD in Higher Education program. I want to understand more about the aspects of your internship experience. The information and ideas you share will be used as part of the final stages in this dissertation process

I will ask a series of questions, prompting you to elaborate on your responses by verbalizing all your thoughts.

After we have reviewed the instructions and you are ready to start, I will start the recording. The session will be recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting thoughts, ideas, and information shared by participants. I will try my best to jot down notes as well.

There are a few things I want you to know:

(1) This entire process is confidential. Data will be de-identified after the interview has concluded. Your names will not appear in any reports or presentations related to this research's findings. With that in mind, please refrain from using your name while we are recording.

(2) Please mute your cell phone to avoid any disruptions, it will help things move more smoothly

(3) If you forget to speak aloud, for example, you just nod in response to a question, I will remind you to describe your answer verbally. I may also ask some follow-up questions for clarification.

This interview should take no more than 60 minutes. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, please respond truthfully and to the best of your knowledge and recollection.

We covered a lot of information! Do you have any questions before we start?

Lastly, you consented to this interview being recorded. If you are ready, I will begin recording now.

Interview Questions

First section:

General questions:

1. Where did you intern?
2. How did you learn about this internship opportunity?
3. What kinds of support was provided to you by the institution in searching and securing this internship opportunity? If none... then question 4...If some....then question 5
4. How did you secure this internship?
5. Were there any discussions with an advisor or campus internship coordinator about potential internship sites/opportunities?
6. Why did you choose to complete this internship?
7. Can you describe your internship experience?

Specifics around requirements/payment/internship course

8. Was this internship required?
9. Were you paid for this internship opportunity?
 1. If No: Did payment influence your decision to take the internship?
10. How did not being paid during your internship affect you in any way?
11. Why did you elect to complete this internship for academic credit?
12. Did the number of credit hours earned accurately reflect your internship workload/job responsibilities?

General feedback on the internship

13. What are your perceptions of internships?
14. What did you like most about your internship?
15. What did you like least about this internship?
16. Do you think you received proper supervision throughout your internship experience?
 1. How often did you meet with your supervisor? Was it 15 minutes, 30 minutes, weekly, monthly
 2. Did you have a consistent supervisor?
 3. Was this person the best equipped person to provide supervision? (In other words, did you work directly with this person)
17. What aspects of this internship experience would you change?

Second section:

Specific feedback on internship

1. What was your primary goal for taking this internship?
2. How do you think this internship will impact your job search or career opportunities?
3. Think about the original job description. How did the internship meet the employer's description of what you would be doing there?
 - a. Was it an accurate job description?
 - b. Did you walk in on your first day knowing exactly what you were going to be doing?
4. Please describe ways the internship met your expectations of what you thought you would be doing.
5. Describe the work you did.
 - a. Was the work difficult?
 - b. How did your responsibilities change?
 - c. Were you given more challenging assignments?
6. Was this internship meaningful to you, did it align with your personal expectations?

Theoretical aspect of the internship

1. How did this internship apply to your academic interests?
2. How did this internship apply to your personal goals?
3. How did this internship apply to your professional aspirations?
4. Which if any classes you have taken did you find particularly helpful in preparing you for an internship?
5. Can you remember any skills or concepts you learned in class that you applied to your tasks during the internship?
6. What new skills or concepts did you gain during your internship?
7. Please take five minutes to reflect on your overall internship experience. After reflecting, then explain how realistic the expectations of the job aligns with your career/field choice?

Final Thoughts on internships

1. Why do you think internships are important?
2. How do you think they help students?
3. What are your final thoughts on internships?

APPENDIX G: CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

Title: Beyond the Classroom: Unveiling Liberal Arts Students' Perceptions of Internships
Investigator: Carissa Forde
Daytime Phone Number: 631-885-5866

RESEARCH CONSENT SUMMARY

You are being asked for your consent to participate in a research study. This document provides a concise summary of this research project. It describes the key information that is needed to determine whether to participate in this research. This document will provide all the relevant details of this research study.

What should I know about this research?

- The researcher will explain the purpose of this study to you.
- Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate is up to you.
- If you choose not to participate, it won't be held against you.
- You can choose to participate now and drop out later, and it won't be held against you.
- If you don't understand, we encourage you to ask clarifying questions.
- We encourage you to ask as many questions as you want before you decide to participate.

How long will I be in this research?

We anticipate that participation will last approximately 75-90 minutes for the total time commitment. These hours comprise the survey (3-5 minutes), participation in the interview (60 minutes) and a possible follow-up interview (15-30 minutes). Data collection will be from February 2023- May 2023.

Why is this research being done?

This study will examine how students enrolled in a liberal arts' social science or humanities major at a liberal arts college within an urban four-year R1 research institution perceive their internship experiences. Specifically focusing on why students elect to complete internships for academic credit when they are not required across all majors, this study will also explore whether specific characteristics of the internship impact their perceptions of the overall experience. This study will use information

collected from 6-8 liberal arts students speaking to the phenomenon of internships and their benefits. or whether payment affects the value of the overall experience gained for students?

What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?

Upon deciding to participate in this research study, the procedures will include completion of the initial screening survey (3-5 minutes), participation in a one-on-one interview with the student investigator (60 minutes), and a potential follow-up interview to clarify any responses (15-30 minutes) Interviews and follow up interviews will be concluded by the end of May 2023.

Selected participants will be asked to answer a series of questions ranging from where they interned to their goals for electing to complete the internship and their perceptions of their internship experience. Students will be prompted to elaborate on some questions to encourage further discussion.

Could being in this research hurt me?

No, there are no intended risks to participants who take part in this research project. To minimize risk, participants will be reminded that their participation is completely voluntary at the beginning of each data collection session.

Will being in this research benefit me?

The potential benefits for participants include the opportunity to reflect and share about their internship experiences. Participants will be able to contribute to the literature about their perceptions of their internship experiences.

DETAILED RESEARCH CONSENT

You are being invited to participate in a research study. An individual who takes part in a research study is called a research subject, or research participant. This document provides a concise summary of this research project. It describes the key information that is needed to determine whether to participate in this research. This document will provide all the relevant details of this research study.

What should I know about this research?

- The researcher will explain the purpose of this study to you.
- Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate is up to you.
- If you choose not to participate, it won't be held against you.
- You can choose to participate now and drop out later, and it won't be held against you.
- If you don't understand, we encourage you to ask clarifying questions.
- We encourage you to ask as many questions as you want before you decide to participate.

Why is this research being done?

This study will examine how students enrolled in a liberal arts' social science or humanities major at a liberal arts college within an urban four-year R1 research institution perceive their internship experiences. Specifically focusing on why students elect to complete internships for academic credit when they are not required across all majors, this study will also explore whether specific characteristics of the internship impact their perceptions of the overall experience. This study will use information collected from 6-8 liberal arts students speaking to the phenomenon of internships and their benefits. For example, does payment vs non-payment affect a student's perception of the internship experience, or whether payment affects the value of the overall experience gained for students?

How long will I be in this research?

We anticipate that participation will last approximately 75-90 minutes for the total time commitment. These hours comprise of the survey (3-5 minutes), participation in the interview (60 minutes) and a possible follow-up interview (15-30 minutes). Data collection will be from February 2023-May 2023.

What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?

Upon deciding to participate in this research study, the procedures will include completion of the initial screening survey (3-5 minutes), participation in a one-on-one interview with the student investigator (60 minutes), and a potential follow-up interview

to clarify any responses (15-30 minutes) Interviews and follow up interviews will be concluded by the end of May 2023.

Selected participants will be asked to answer a series of questions ranging from where they interned to their goals for electing to complete the internship and their perceptions of their internship experience. Students will be prompted to elaborate on some questions to encourage further discussion.

What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be responsible for completing a 3–5-minute screening survey (upon IRB approval), a 60-minute virtual interview (between March 2023- May 2023) with the potential for a 15-30-minute follow-up interview (late May 2023).

Could being in this research hurt me?

No, there are no intended risks to participants who take part in this research project. To minimize risk, participants will be reminded that their participation is completely voluntary at the beginning of each data collection session.

Will being in this research benefit me?

There is no promise of any benefits for participants who choose to take part in this research study. However, participants can benefit from the reflection of sharing their internship experience.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

The private information collected during this research will be shared with individuals and organizations (if applicable) that conduct and/or watch over this research, including:

- The research sponsors
- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research
- Liberal arts college
- Outside transcription company

The results of this research might be published. However, all identifiable information such as participant name. Any identifiable information will always remain confidential.

Protection of disclosure of participant information will be practiced to the extent required by law. However, the researcher is unable to promise complete secrecy.

Data collected in this research will be de-identified and could potentially be used for future research or distributed to another investigator for future research. Participant's full consent will be requested prior to the sharing of information.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If participants have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research study can potentially hurt them in any way, we encourage them to talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research project is being overseen by the Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). The IRB is a group of professionals who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or irb@temple.edu if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

Can I be removed from this research without my approval?

The researcher has the right to remove any participants from the study without their approval. Some possible reasons for removal include:

- It is within the best interest of the participant
- The participant is unable to keep their scheduled appointments

The researcher will inform participants about any new information that may affect their health, welfare, or choice to stay in the research study.

What happens if I agree to be in this research, but I change my mind later?

If at any time a participant decides to leave this research study, they are encouraged to contact the research team so that the investigator can remove their data from consideration in the study. Additionally, any participant’s decision to participate or to withdraw will be confidential and will not be shared with others.