# CHAPTER 2

# A Review of the Literature: Internships and Best Practices

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## INTRODUCTION

Are internships worth doing? What can they add to students' education and to a political science degree? What does research teach us about effective practices? To answer these essential questions and others, this review of the research literature takes a panoramic look at published work on academic internships and delves into political science scholarship specifically. While this chapter does not center exclusively on studies specific to the discipline, it provides a larger context for understanding the pedagogical value of internships and explores the evidence-based instructional practices that can help students achieve various experiential learning outcomes.

Following the Introduction that defines the contours of political science internships, this chapter spells out how they have been studied. After a brief look at how researchers have approached the study of internships and a leading theory explaining why experiential learning[1] is generally valued, the discussion turns to an exploration of student learning goals and how these are treated as benchmarks for measuring a mix of educational and career-related learning outcomes from internships. We then review the kinds of benefits and challenges for internship stakeholders that researchers have identified.

Obtaining advantageous outcomes is a concern of internship practitioners in all academic disciplines, and broad consensus about how to facilitate effective learning through specific methods has emerged from a sizable body of scholarship. These prescriptively-labeled "best practices" for faculty, students, and internship providers are reviewed next, followed by a closer look at the evidence-based practices that can reinforce political science internship programs. Significant findings from the literature are condensed into tables for easy reference.

Despite its wide scope, this review is not meant to provide a comprehensive blueprint for conducting internships in all settings. Rather, it is intended to establish an empirical foundation for the chapters that follow, presenting evidence that underpins arguments and recommendations that are woven into this volume. It prepares a stage for contributor insights and thus should prompt the reader to dive into subsequent chapters to learn more. The conclusions from studies reviewed here suggest a basic set of practices that, when implemented systematically and purposefully, can render internships valuable elements of political science programs.

## THE LITERATURE EXPANDS

Although internships have existed for over a century, in the 1960s, experiential education became the focus of a movement to connect theory with practice (Dworkis, Thomas, and Weintraub 1962; Hennessy 1970; Hirschfield and Adler 1973; Murphy 1973). Since that time scholars have developed and honed an array of practices to render internships worthwhile learning experiences that merit the awarding of academic credit, their research amounting to a sizable literature that spans academia. Through essays reflecting on firsthand experience and empirical approaches that largely rely on survey responses, internship evaluations, interviews, and student-level data,[2] this scholarship tends to affirm that high-quality

experiential learning provides direct and residual benefits for students, departments, institutions, and internship site providers. Despite the continuing need for longitudinal studies, those that contain control groups, and more rigorous statistical controls generally, practitioners and scholars have endorsed the idea that internships are vital, if not *essential,* undergraduate experiences that help bridge education and career (Ahmad 2020; Busteed and Auter 2017; Clark and Martin 2016; Johnson 2016; Kuh 2008).

Much of the very early research on internships tended to lack theoretical grounding, relying mainly on descriptive anecdotes, correlation, and small-n studies whose conclusions were not generalizable (Narayanan, Olk, and Fukami 2010). However, spurred by the recognition of internships as a "high-impact practice" generating multiple benefits for students—especially those who have historically been marginalized or underserved by institutions of higher education[3]—rigorous empirical studies exploring the design of internship programs and their measurable outcomes have multiplied (Finley and McNair 2013; McClellan, Kopko, and Gruber 2021). Despite copious information about how to design internship programs and courses—after all, most recommendations are generalizable across academic disciplines—lack of uniformity in course content, requirements for academic credit, and learning outcomes prevails in political science (Gentry and Van Vechten 2018; Moon and Schokman 2000; Van Vechten and Gentry 2017).

## LEARNING THROUGH DOING

Meaningful academic internships place student learning at the center of all internship activities (Whitaker 1989), whether that learning occurs passively, such as through reading or observation and listening, or (preferably) actively, through grappling with concepts and ideas in real time and then reconstructing and reorganizing that knowledge (Dewey 1938; Eyler 2009; Jarvis, Holford, and Griffin 2003). Research generally demonstrates the power of applying knowledge and practicing skills in "authentic, real-world situations, with all the contextual idiosyncrasies and unpredictability that entails"; these activities engender "deep and flexible learning" (Ambrose and Poklop 2015, 55) in environments and in ways that neither simulations nor case studies can fully achieve. Experiential learning extends the classroom, giving students the chance to create and transform knowledge through feeling, observing, conceptualizing, and experimenting (Kolb 1984), and to integrate theoretical or factual knowledge through practice (Ambrose et al. 2010; Ambrose and Poklop 2015; D'Aloisio 2006).[4] This kind of learning is reflected in Whitaker's five criteria for the awarding of academic credit for experiential learning such as internships:

1. Credit should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience;
2. College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning;
3. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application;
4. The determination of competence levels and credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts; and
5. Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted. (Whitaker 1989, xvii)[5]

These principles form the bedrock for building and delivering academic internship programs. They imply that learning must occur not only through meaningful work in the internship, but also through supporting assignments, discussions, and reflective activities that are guided by mentors or instructors. Internships, therefore, enable learning in more than one setting and through active integration of theory and practice (Lowenthal and Sosland 2007).

## POLITICAL SCIENCE INTERNSHIPS: LEARNING GOALS, LEARNING OUTCOMES, AND BENEFITS

In political science internships, students witness how issues relating to the common welfare are dealt with in the public sphere, often through governmental or legal means (see the Introduction for a fuller definition). What tends to distinguish political science internships from those in other liberal arts disciplines is the centrality of public policy-oriented issues, and key learning goals—either implicitly or explicitly—should be related to the exploration of core political science concepts such as power, equality, fairness, and liberty, among others, and their expression in real-world contexts (Pecorella 2007).

Logically, students also pursue internships in order to develop the attitudes, skills, and aptitudes that will help them transition from college to a career, often perceiving these (and only these) practical outcomes as worthwhile. Although some academics who insist on pure scholarship and rigorous training will object to the "creeping vocationalism" that practical objectives imply (DiMaggio 2018), others argue equally forcefully that transferable skills are absolutely fundamental to the acquisition of 21st century education, recognizing that interns' scholarly capacities should translate into work abilities (Clark and Martin 2016). It is up to instructors and faculty mentors to bridge these two worlds by helping the student articulate a range of goals that integrate academic and practical work as seamlessly as possible.

Whereas individual learning goals should be tailored to the internship placement, another way to measure individual progress is by assessing competencies in order to demonstrate the value of internships to a liberal arts and a political science curriculum. For example, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), just one of several higher education associations to have moved in this direction,[6] has articulated standard outcomes for internships[7] that are derived from general learning domains such as knowledge acquisition, cognitive complexity (critical thinking), personal growth and development, civic engagement, practical competence, and interpersonal competence (2015). These overlap the eight career readiness competencies spelled out by NACE (2021), namely: career and self-development; communication; critical thinking; equity and inclusion; leadership; professionalization; teamwork; and technology.[8] In NACE's schematic, these universal competencies represent clusters of knowledge, abilities, and skills that liberal arts students should master in preparation for post-graduation work.[9]

To estimate the impact or effectiveness of internship experiences, scholars have focused largely on individual-level learning outcomes that are measured by the actual or perceived development of competencies such as these (Maertz, Stoeberl, Marks 2013; Nghia and Duyen 2019). Some of the major findings about the instrumental value of experiential learning are summarized below, categorized by competency domain: educational outcomes and academic gains; knowledge and cognition; civics and ethics; self-development; and skills, career-related in particular.

***Educational Outcomes and Academic Gains.*** A large subset of research is concerned with the effects of internships on students' performance in college. Noting first that participation in high-impact practices tends to be inequitable, with first generation, transfer students, and African American and Latino students least likely to have such experiences, Kuh, O'Donnell, and Schneider (2017) find that participation in "high-impact practices" (HIPs) such as internships enables deeper forms of learning and higher rates of student success, and these effects accrue to all students, but proportionally more for students from historically underserved groups (c.f. Kuh 2008; O'Neill 2010; Kuh et al. 2010; Kuh and O'Donnell 2013). Scholars such as Kuh (2008) and Kuh, O'Donnell, and Schneider (2017) empirically demonstrate the effects of experiential learning on student success, which manifests in an "undergraduate experience marked by academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and acquisition of desired learning outcomes that prepare one to live an economically self-sufficient, civically responsible, and rewarding life" (2017, 9). Whether these effects hold for political science internships specifically remains an open question, a point that McClellan, Kopko, and Gruber (2021) make in their study of high-impact practices in the discipline. Their analysis, based on National Survey of Student Engagement data (NSSE 2019, which documents that nearly half of all college student respondents completed internships of all kinds, either independently or through a program), demonstrates self-reported gains in practical competencies such as interpersonal and career skills, but unearths no significant impacts on other abilities such as analyzing and applying theories. They recognize that this finding could be due to the fact that all internship experiences were surveyed, regardless of their connection to a directed course of study.

Parker III et al. (2016) confirm that students who engage in internships tend to make greater three-year gains in grade-point averages (GPA) than their counterparts who do not engage in internships, and also find the positive impact on fourth-year grades to be significantly more pronounced at some types of schools than at others, particularly at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). Because of the strong, positive effects on the academic performance of students who had lower grades prior to interning, they emphasize that institutions "must grant access to varying student academic levels as students who might benefit from the experience are possibly being denied the opportunity to gain from it" (2016, 108). Although earlier studies located marginal negative impacts of working outside of college on GPA (Ehrenberg and Sherman 1987), more recently Routon and Walker (2018) conclude from their large-n study of internship program completion and continuity in college attendance[10] that internship participation is associated with higher student grades. Knouse, Tanner, and Harris (1999) also found that students with internship experience had significantly higher average grades than their counterparts, as did Lowenthal and Sosland (2007) who found that the Washington, DC semester internship experience had a positive impact on participants' subsequent academic performance, especially for females and government majors, as compared to students who did not intern. Further academic performance benefits include a reduction in stress and improved adjustment to new life circumstances (Binder et al. 2015; Chemers, Hu, and Garcia 2001).

***Knowledge and Cognition.*** Improved college performance is likely related to the cognitive development that interns can experience in well-structured internships. In their (small-n) study of political science research interns in Australia, Moon and Schokman (2000) write that students "learned vivid lessons concerning the issues of knowledge in the policy process and the relationship between theory and practice in politics. As a result, we conclude that the internships provided greater benefits than vocational relevance alone. They also enriched the students' political science education" (175). This conclusion is echoed in a number of studies (c.f. Simons et al. 2012), but it has not been established that interns acquire significantly more in-depth understanding of academic content compared to their counterparts who do not complete internships (Aldas et al. 2010). Regardless, in their (large-n) longitudinal study of undergraduates at US colleges and universities, Kilgo, Sheets, and Pascarella (2015) find that students who intern evidence greater satisfaction with cognitive activities and a higher need for cognition (how much one enjoys thinking).[11]

***Civics and Ethics.*** For students of political science, connecting with constituencies that a public agency or nonprofit organization serves can deepen an intern's sense of purpose and community, and likely their participation in it (McCartney, Bennion, and Simpson 2013). As Alex-Assensoh and Ryan (2008) assert, increased engagement among students is an important resource for social capital and American democracy, and they find that among former Washington Internship Institute interns, students translate their learning-by-immersion into policy strategies they pursue in their own states or local communities. Lowenthal and Sosland (2007) document similar impacts of the DC semester on former interns, specifically in higher rates of involvement in service learning as well as campus and community activities post-internship, compared to those who do not intern. Kilgo, Sheets, and Pascarella (2015) note that interns also tend to develop a sense of socially responsible leadership, and Aldas et al.'s (2010) analysis of National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data reveals that two-thirds (66%) of undergraduate seniors in an experiential-intensive course of study[12] reported that they felt able to contribute to the welfare of their community, compared to only 48% of all other respondents.

***Self-Development.*** One of the ways that internships permit personal growth is by placing individuals in unfamiliar situations that tend to bring interests, values, and beliefs into sharper focus. Through interning, students can develop greater confidence in their abilities as well as awareness of their strengths and limitations (Anderson et al. 2002). Being able to decide against a possible career without major consequences is a distinct benefit; and conversely, successful internships can translate into more clearly defined post-baccalaureate plans. Comparative data analyzed by Bradberry and De Maio (2019; their study was also longitudinal[13]), Routon and Walker (2015), and Lowenthal and Sosland (2007) show that interns have a higher likelihood of attending or planning to attend graduate school or law school.

***Career Readiness Skills.*** Apart from the discipline-specific knowledge that students might gain or reinforce through public affairs internships, the transferable career-readiness skills they acquire can also resonate academically as well as in their life's work. Among the soft skills developed through (in-per-

son) internships are interpersonal skills such as teamwork or collaborating with peers to solve problems, and communication, including listening, and being able to address different audiences verbally and in writing. Students should be able to convey ideas clearly on paper and in emails, in person and online, and formally and informally (Foster Shoaf 2020; Routon and Walker 2015). Much of the same skill development also occurs in virtual or remote internships (Criso, Low, and Townsend 2021; Hora et al. 2021a; Jeske and Axtell 2018). An added value of these skills is enhanced employability, and several studies in different fields have documented a boost to former interns' chances of being hired after graduation compared to those who did not complete an internship (Gault, Leach, and Duey 2010; Harvey, Moon, and Geall 1997; Knouse, Tanner, and Harris 1999; Silva et al. 2016)—a condition that holds for students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities as well (Williams et al. 2020). However, except for Bradberry and De Maio (2019), who find that significant employment benefits accrue to political science interns specifically, most of these studies have been conducted outside the discipline, and further research is needed to confirm whether public affairs internships garner the same employability effects as they do for those who major in business and science.

When students experience the conditions that foster benefits such as these, their satisfaction can be long-lasting—as researchers who conduct longitudinal studies or studies of alumni have discovered. For instance, in their survey of graduates from a political science department, Raile et al. (2017) found that alumni respondents recommended that students be given more information about internships and more help obtaining them, and the researchers concluded that they had underestimated the perceived importance of internship experiences to alumni.

Unsurprisingly, as experienced internship coordinators know, not all experiences yield the desired outcomes that faculty propose and students seek, and the degree and scope of derived benefits vary widely among individual students—even those who land the same internship placement and start with the same basic skillset. While scholars and practitioners have catalogued a multitude of challenges and adverse conditions that can prevent learning and skill development (Hesser 2014; Lei and Yin 2019; Wang and Chen 2015), they have also demonstrated empirically that certain internship practices yield greater benefits than others, and these have come to be known colloquially as "best practices."

## THE MEANING OF *BEST PRACTICES* IN INTERNSHIPS

Generalizable research on undergraduate interns has generated broad consensus about how to facilitate effective learning through certain methods and approaches, or what some collectively refer to as "best practices." Although a strict definition of best practices would be those standards that emerge from a research process that eliminates all other competing explanations for outcomes (Bretschneider, Marc-Aurele, and Wu 2005)—a standard that we neither claim to reach here nor locate in the literature—for the purposes of this discussion, we use the term loosely and define them as *activities that experienced educators broadly acknowledge as generating effective internship outcomes* and which are *based on empirical evidence* and *rooted in accepted standards*. It should be kept in mind, however, that most of what is known about internships is based on studies of in-person or face-to-face experiences that were prevalent by the mid-1900s, although as noted above, recent work has shown that virtual or remote internships can produce many of the same outcomes (Hora et al. 2021a; Jeske 2019; Jeske and Axtell 2016; and see Chapter 15 by Cabrera Rasmussen and Van Vechten). Conclusions about effective methods are also based on studies of students who have completed courses or coursework associated with internships, and usually by choice (i.e. they engaged in non-compulsory internships); Klein and Weiss (2011), for instance, find evidence that compelling students to intern can have negative rather than positive outcomes. Additionally, recent research also calls attention to biases based on a preponderance of White students among current and past populations of interns (Ericksen and Williamson-Ashe 2019; Hora, Gopal, and Wolfgram 2021; Hora et al. 2021b; Knouse, Tanner, and Harris 1999; Williams et al. 2020). All of these factors are worth considering when reviewing the current state of the literature on internships.

To engage in best practices is to assume that certain conditions must be present if "excellence in outcomes" is to be obtained (King 2014). Among the conditions that scholars have identified as either necessary and/or sufficient for quality internship programming,[14] *institutional capacity* in the form of commitment and sufficient resources rises to the top. Universities and colleges must articulate and pursue standards for well-executed, integrative learning experiences—standards that should be built

## *Table 1: Summary of Best Practices in Internships*

### COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY

### Administrators & Staff; Faculty/Instructors

GENERAL OBJECTIVES/DESIRED OUTCOMES: **FULFILL EDUCATIONAL MISSION** OF GRADUATING A DIVERSE GROUP OF KNOWLEDGEABLE AND SKILLED STUDENTS WHO CAN ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL AS PEOPLE, CITIZENS, AND WORKERS; BUILD INSTITUTIONAL REPUTATION FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE; INCREASE STUDENT RETENTION, GRADUATION RATES, AND PRODUCTIVITY OF ALUMNI.

**Maximize opportunities for student learning:** "Identify relevant and desirable student learning and development outcomes" (CAS 2015); offer a wide range of placements so students can apply knowledge in different settings and with new people (Kuh 2008); offer on-campus internships (Fede et al. 2017); encourage traditional-length (min 5- to 12-wk) internships; recruit students at all levels to intern (Hora et al. 2020; Parker et al. 2016).

**Develop impactful pedagogy:** Intentionally design coterminous, credited curriculum (an internship class) so students can integrate, synthesize, and apply knowledge (Kuh 2008; Kolb 1984, Beard & Wilson 2013); purposefully design programs to critically explore relationships among concepts, theory, & knowledge gained both in courses and practical settings (CAS 2015). Generate reflective writing & reflective discussion about issues such as the distribution of power in society or organizational behavior, students' skills, attitudes, & interests, and observed professional & ethical behaviors (Ambrose et al. 2010; CAS 2015; Clark 2003; Stirling et al. 2017); have students keep & review a weekly journal, highlighting recurring themes or ideas (O'Neill 2010).

**Offer complementary co-curricular activities:** Develop or provide students with links to internship-related materials, e.g. guides for writing résumés, professional conduct, & reflection; practice and review mock interviews (Gavigan 2010; Eyler & Giles 1999; Kolb 1984).

**Incorporate equity:** Properly compensate & support campus coordinators (CAS 2015); ensure enough internships are available and appropriate for all demographic & developmental profiles of student population & institutional programs (CAS 2015; Parker III et al. 2016; Zilvinskis 2017); provide universal access to internship-related materials; address financial needs inclusively (Scott-Clayton 2017); disseminate info to achieve consistency; reach all who might potentially benefit from programs or financial aid; partner with site supervisors who understand goals & can provide feedback continually (Deschaine & Jankens 2017; Eyler 2009; Kennedy et al. 2015).

**Assess student progress & program.** Administer pre- and post-assessment surveys; collect written student evaluations (CAS 2015); conclude experience with final presentations or public reports (Reding & O'Bryan 2013); review program (CAS 2015).

**Maintain external relations.** Build relationships with providers through repeated personal contact (CAS 2015; Kuh 2008).

### STUDENT

GENERAL OBJECTIVES/DESIRED OUTCOMES: **BUILD KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, NETWORKS:** PREPARE FOR POST-GRADUATION WORK AND LIFE SATISFACTION AND SUCCESS: GAIN/TEST SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS, SELF-KNOWLEDGE, INSIGHTS ABOUT POSSIBLE CAREER(S), ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT COMMUNITY, NETWORK

**Apply and build discipline-related knowledge.** Apply theoretical knowledge to new situations (Anderson 2014; Crebert et al. 2004; Hindmoor 2010; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt 2010) discover relevance of learning through real-world applications (Kuh & O'Donnell 2013; Aldas et al. 2010). Intentionally gather info from professionals in the field through planned assignments such as on-site interviews (Gavigan 2010).

**Develop and apply transferable competencies & skills.** Invest significant effort and time to practice & develop skills, and seek constructive feedback in order to adjust behaviors: communication (speaking & writing), teamwork (diplomacy & cooperation), time management, critical thinking, computing/information technology, independence, and problem-solving, work-related expertise (Coker at al. 2017; Crebert et al. 2004; Griffin, Lorenz, & Mitchell 2010; Hocking et al. 2004; King 2014; Robles 2012). Take active role in charting short- and long-term plans, e.g. 4-year plan (Carey 2010; Crebert et al. 2004).

## *Table 1: Summary of Best Practices in Internships*

**Prepare for (engaged) citizenship.** Contribute to welfare of community through meaningful work (Coker et al. 2017; Callanan & Benzing 2004); understand differences, develop appreciation of a diverse society including people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Coker et al. 2017; Schamber & Mahoney 2008); formulate new attitudes that lead to potential changes in civic behavior and participation (Eyler & Giles 1999; Mariani and Klinkner 2009; Simons et al. 2012).

**Develop self-knowledge, more accurate self-concept, and ethical perspectives.** Develop awareness of personal values, goals, and self-concept through reflection writing and discussion (Brooks et al. 1995; O'Neill 2010; Simons et al. 2012; Stirling et al. 2017); build resilience and confidence through persistence (Goodenough et al. 2020; Liu et al. 2011; Yeh 2010).

**Discern one's career path (pursue career development).** Develop cultural awareness of workplace; practice cooperation by working with as many different persons as possible, observe workplace etiquette and leadership (Crebert et al. 2004); change or add second major or minor (CAS 2015); explore "career fit" by investigating career choices without lifelong commitment, or validate a career path or discover what one doesn't want to do (Callanan & Benzing 2004; Dailey 2016; Gavigan 2010; O'Neill 2010; Greenhaus et al. 2000). Develop confidence about ability to enter workforce or attend graduate school (Acai et al. 2014; Bradberry and De Maio 2019; Cedercreutz & Cates 2010).

### INTERNSHIP PROVIDER

GENERAL OBJECTIVES/DESIRED OUTCOMES: **DERIVE ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS**: SHORT-TERM: LABOR, KNOWLEDGE, WORK PRODUCT/PRODUCTIVITY; LONG-TERM: KNOWLEDGE, RELIABLE LABOR FORCE WITH REQUISITE CAPACITIES AND SKILLS TO PROCURE HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY RATES, BETTER REPUTATION, STRONGER TIES TO UNIVERSITY OR INTEGRATION WITH COMMUNITY

**Develop human resources/present and future labor force:** Trained, site supervisors must understand the student's learning goals & partner with the academic supervisor provide continuous monitoring and frequent feedback (Eyler 2009; Kuh and O'Donnell 2013). Develop useful artifacts such as internship evaluations indicating a prospective employee's readiness (Hart/AAC&U 2008). Communicate with campus to increase likelihood of knowledge transfers with future interns and campus as source of potential employees (Reagans & McEvily, 2003; Narayanan et al. 2010).

**Promote work productivity and student learning:** Assume the role of an educator (Sosland and Lowenthal 2017). Develop a work agreement with the intern, collaboratively, before work begins (Kuh 2013), and clarify work goals in a learning contract once the intern has been exposed to the organization; give interns significant, varied, goals-focused assignments that are clearly related to the academic goals of the program, student's interests, and worksite's expertise, and cover breadth and depth of issues (Clayton 2013; Eyler 2010; Kuh 2008; Kuh & O'Donnell 2013; Thessin & Donnelly-Smith 2010). Match students to appropriate projects, minimizing clerical tasks (Uzzi & Lancaster 2002); vary settings to increase student interaction with different people and situations (Brooks et al. 1995); make good use of the person's abilities (Narayanan 2010); give frequent, timely, and constructive feedback, including final, written evaluations that are reviewed with intern and shared with campus coordinators (Kuh & O'Donnell 2013; O'Neill 2010); give interns a platform to share or demonstrate their competence and progress, such as through a presentation to others, and recognize good work (Donnelly-Smith 2010; Kuh 2008; Kuh & O'Donnell 2013; Reding & O'Bryan 2013).

into programs from the beginning so that assessments can be performed regularly and subsequent adjustments can be made in a process of continual improvement. Sufficient resources include access to technical information and personnel adequate to support programmatic objectives and institutional missions. Institutions must adequately compensate faculty, administrators, or staff who are responsible for coordinating a program (see Chapter 10 by Gentry). Responsibility for meeting standards must be borne by faculty, who must be responsive to students' educational needs, and students, who must be prepared and motivated to learn and fulfill roles in suitable organizations. Collaboration among stakeholders is also key: as one scholar puts it, "Internships at their best are a partnership among students, campus professionals, faculty, and employers" (Carey 2010, n.p.).

The "partners," or stakeholders as they are referred to here, include the following: (a) institutional actors: faculty and instructors who deliver internship programs, but also administrators and staff; (b) student interns; and (c) employers, internship providers, or site supervisors—all of whom are motivated by different but complementary objectives. Table 1 summarizes the major types of tasks these stakeholders should assume if they are to create the conditions for internship success. The table synthesizes the evidence-based practices that researchers have identified as being positively associated with stakeholders' respective goals.[15]

**College and University Stakeholders: Faculty, Instructors, Staff, and Administrators**. At the college or university level, administrators, staff, instructors, and faculty collaborate to deliver the educational mission of their institutions and the learning goals of their colleges and departments, which revolve around graduating students who have the tools to achieve their potential as persons in society, in the economy and workplace, and as members of a political community (Jacoby 2009). They must do so equitably, enabling wide and inclusive access to learning opportunities. For some, the need to build and maintain their institution's reputation or "brand" of education could incentivize curricular innovation such as internship classes with embedded research, and for others this need might lead to more centralized, coordinated planning of internship opportunities, such as through a campus internship office (see Chapter 12 by Chávez Metoyer). Because institutions also benefit from having a stable student population, it behooves them to increase student retention and graduation rates as well as to ensure the productivity of their alumni by offering high-impact learning experiences such as internships (Anderson 2014; Kuh 2008; Zilvinskis 2017). Although many campuses centralize internship coordination in career centers, academic departments are often tasked with internship programming, or faculty develop programs to meet perceived student needs for experiential education. Across campus, programming must be well-coordinated and "integrated into the life of the institution" (CAS 2015, 7).

**Students as Stakeholders**. Student interns also have incentives to engage in "best practices" in their quest to obtain, earn, and build knowledge, intellectual and practical skills, and networks that will enable them to succeed post-graduation in their personal lives, in society, and in the economy. To succeed in their internship placements and beyond, they must take advantage of opportunities to become more competent communicators who can work with others as well as independently, problem-solve, and use their expertise, thereby developing a sense of civic competence, possibly an inclination for civic engagement, and an understanding of differences among people in a diverse political community (Yates and Youniss 1996). Through work, observation, and reflection, their perspectives, attitudes, and awareness might grow in ways that help them to flourish as political science majors, with the ability to discern and chart their career paths more deliberately. Through on-site tasks, they can build their capacity for skills and traits that will help them succeed as interns, students, and future contributors to the workforce (see Chapter 4 by McQueen, Jenkins, and Wiley).

**Internship Providers and Site Supervisors as Stakeholders.** Employers also are concerned with shaping a productive workforce both in the short- and long-term, and can benefit by giving interns the opportunity to develop and share their labor and growing expertise. They are also educators (Sosland and Lowenthal 2017). If employers work with campus coordinators to fulfill students' goals, providing continual supervision and feedback, and challenging students to excel, the arrangement can be mutually beneficial (Shindell 2019; see Chapter 8 by Lowenthal and Sosland). The literature is clear about the need for communication between campus educators and providers to establish expectations about how internships can fulfill their educational mission (Narayanan et al. 2010), and expectations should be made explicit in contracts signed by supervisors and the student before the work begins (Pecorella 2007; see also Chapter 5 by Simpson, Braam, and Winston). Throughout the internship the supervisor should

be accessible and welcome questions (Hora et al. 2020). The internship provider should match students to appropriate and challenging projects, varying projects to increase interns' exposure to situations where they can problem-solve, maximizing interns' interaction with diverse people inside and outside the organization, making interns feel that they and their work are valued in the organization, and minimizing clerical tasks (Thessin and Clayton 2013; Eyler 2010; Donnelly-Smith 2010). As a trusted role model, a site supervisor can help interns navigate ethical issues (Titus and Ballou 2014). Hora et al. (2020) note that supervisor behaviors that include open communication, accessibility, and paying attention to interns' learning are significantly and positively associated with intern satisfaction and career development. Finally, alumni who serve as internship providers and mentors can also augment the institution's ability to deliver impactful learning (Raile et al. 2017).

Because of the curricular role that departments typically play in managing internships, it also makes sense for this review to cover, in more detail, specific "best practices" that political scientists can implement at the department level in their pursuit of desired outcomes. What does recent scholarship reveal about best practices in political science internship programming? Only a handful of broad assessments of effective political science practices have been conducted (Ahmad 2020; Collins, Gibbs and Schiff 2012; Hindmoor 2010), and other research explores narrower aspects of internships in the discipline. Table 2 presents a synthesis of evidence-based findings and conclusions relating to best practices in political science internships.[16]

## BEST PRACTICES IN POLITICAL SCIENCE INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

Virtually all scholarship related to effective internship practices emphasizes the critical role of faculty mentors and the importance of internship courses. Pecorella (2007) emphasizes that a "coterminous academic component"—an intentionally-designed internship class for which students earn credit—*must* accompany the internship experience. Simply earning credit isn't enough, for as he puts it, "In the absence of a structured academic component, the internship experience is too limited and, as a consequence, may actually prove antithetical to the values of liberal arts education" (2007, 80). Pedagogically, the class should be intentionally structured to incorporate readings and assignments that enable students to critically explore core political science concepts such as power, fairness, inequality, or justice, and to actively compare theoretical knowledge to practical experience (CAS 2015; Pecorella 2007). A singular text or set of readings could be assigned to the class, or students might be asked to develop and read from a short list of titles that relate directly to their individual internship work.

Because learning depends on active, critical reflection (Blount 2006; Carson and Fisher 2006), students must engage in reflective writing followed by discussion. A careful process of reflection obliges students to consider their skill development, possible changes in their attitudes and interests, and their observations about professional and ethical behaviors in the workplace (Stirling et al. 2017; CAS 2015; Ambrose et al. 2010; Clark 2003). Some of these issues can be covered in a daily log or weekly journal, with entries recorded as responses to prompts (Alm 1996; Gavigan 2010). Entries can then be translated into a biweekly or monthly summation in which they highlight recurring themes or ideas retrospectively (Anderson 2014; Gavigan 2010; O'Neill 2010; Colby et al. 2007), and also relate them to assigned texts or materials from related political science courses. These records can provide personal yardsticks for interns and enable campus coordinators to take stock of the kinds of issues each placement site tends to raise (Colby et al. 2007, 244). Students also need to complete a final research paper or project that provides a basis for assessing academic outcomes (Pecorella 2007; see also Chapter 16 by Clucas in this volume). Finally, a public forum in which students make a final presentation or report on their experiences, either at their internship site or on campus (or both), can promote self-reflection and learning, and also help publicize the program to prospective interns (Bradberry and DeMaio 2019; Donovan, Porter, and Stellar 2010; Reding and O'Bryan 2013).

In addition to developing an impactful internship curriculum, faculty sponsors must play different roles throughout an internship to fully implement best practices. Their one-on-one mentorship becomes especially critical if no internship courses are offered through the department or on campus. Berg scrutinizes the role of mentors in detail in Chapter 6 (of this volume), expanding upon Pecorella's (2007)

***Table 2: Best Practices in Political Science Internships***

## DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL: FACULTY/INSTRUCTORS

GENERAL OBJECTIVES/DESIRED OUTCOMES: **FULFILL EDUCATIONAL MISSION** OF GRADUATING KNOWLEDGEABLE AND SKILLED POLITICAL SCIENCE MAJORS OR MINORS WHO CAN ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL AS WORKERS, CITIZENS, AND PEOPLE; BUILD DEPARTMENTAL REPUTATION FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE; INCREASE STUDENT RETENTION, GRADUATION RATES, AND PRODUCTIVITY OF ALUMNI.

**Maximize opportunities for student learning:**

- Identify a wide range of public affairs-oriented internship experiences
- Ensure enough public affairs internships are available for all demographic & developmental profiles of major/minor population (Zilvinskis 2017; CAS 2015)
- Find opportunities where students can experience different settings and encounter a diverse range of people & situations (Kuh 2008)
- Identify student development/learning outcomes directly related to political science coursework, engaging major questions in the discipline & subfields of interest (CAS 2015)
- Review possible learning outcomes with students to raise awareness of benefits to be gained through interning (Nghia & Duyen 2019).
- Match student interest to the form of the internship: civic ed/service-oriented or research-based (Donavan 2011)
- Design traditional-length (5- to 12 -week) internships (Gilmore et al. 2015)
- Develop internships with a focus on public affairs, governing, or policy (Fede et al. 2017)
- Provide systematic, proactive monitoring prior to, during, and immediately following the internship (Pecorella 2007)
- Give students the freedom to choose; refrain from compulsory internships (Klein & Weiss 2011)

**Develop impactful pedagogy:**

- Intentionally design and deliver a coterminous, credited internship class so students can "integrate, synthesize, and apply knowledge" (Kuh 2008; Beard & Wilson 2018; Kolb 1984)
- Partner with site supervisors to communicate department goals and academic major/minor expectations and requirements (Eyler 2009; Kennedy et al., 2015; Hoyle & Deschaine 2016)
- Finalize a work-learning contract that site supervisor will carefully review (Pecorella 2007)
- Use class time and assignments to critically explore relationships among concepts, theory, & knowledge reinforced or expanded in practical, public-affairs settings (CAS 2015).
- Generate reflective writing & reflective discussion about issues such as the distribution of power in society or organizational behavior
- Develop guidelines for reflection; generate reflective writing & reflective discussion about students' skills, attitudes, & interests, and observed professional & ethical behaviors (Stirling et al. 2017; CAS 2015; Moore 2013; Ambrose et al. 2010, Clark 2003)
- Have students keep & review a daily or weekly journal, highlighting recurring themes or ideas (Anderson 2014; O'Neill 2010; Gavigan 2010; Colby et al. 2007).
- Assign a final research paper; monitor progress in stages
- Conclude experience with final student presentations or public reports (Reding & O'Bryan 2013)
- Make sure students know their rights; faculty must know reporting protocols in case of on-site misconduct or harassment (Diamond-Welch & Hetzel-Riggin 2018; Yamada 2016)

**Offer complementary co-curricular activities:**

- Offer guides for interviews; practice and review mock interviews (Gavigan 2010; Eyler & Giles 1999; Kolb 1984)
- Develop or provide links to career development-related materials such as résumé-writing or workplace etiquette guides

**Distribute resources equitably:**

- Chairs should ensure internship coordination and close advising work is compensated through (fractional or whole) course releases
- Integrate internship course into political science curriculum (CAS 2015)
- Provide universal access to internship-related materials (CAS 2015)
- Use department resources to disseminate information about opportunities (for internships, related coursework, financial aid) to all majors and minors
- Address financial needs inclusively by developing opportunities for interns to receive grants or be paid (Scott-Clayton 2017; Yamada 2016)

**Assess student progress & program:**

- Administer pre- and post-assessment surveys, including student self-assessment
- Conduct mid-internship eval including an on-site visit if possible (Pecorella 2007)
- Collect written evaluations of student at conclusion of internship (CAS 2015)
- Collect final evaluations of program by students (CAS 2015)
- Review program periodically (CAS 2015)
- Maintain external relations: build relationships with providers through repeated personal contact, including alumni who can help strengthen relationships between department and community (CAS 2015; Kuh 2008)

pointed statement: "Rule number one, successful internships require systematic and proactive monitoring prior to, during, and immediately following the internship experience" (2007, 79). First, a faculty sponsor or coordinator must work with the student to capitalize on a completed self-assessment (see the Supplemental Internship Resources section for sample questions) in order to identify fitting placements, and soon after, a set of measurable learning goals that will be communicated to an internship provider before work begins (CAS 2015). The articulation of a student's academic interests, internship objectives, and career intentions, in addition to programmatic/departmental expectations, allow site supervisors to help design relevant projects and minimize menial work. Faculty sponsors should therefore help students develop a work-learning contract that will outline the intern's and worksite's educational partnership, preferably one that spells out a project that the organization needs (Hindmoor 2010) but connects to coursework, and is a realistic fit with the individual's capacities but also contains challenging tasks (O'Neill 2010).

Faculty should also facilitate an in-person evaluation with the student midway through the term, noting unmet objectives and progress made, and implement course corrections if necessary (Pecorella 2007). This check-in also enables the intern to raise concerns that may be difficult to voice to a supervisor directly. A site visit can allow consultation with the supervisor as well. At the conclusion of an internship, campus coordinators must collect final, written evaluations of the intern's performance, and in reviewing the results with the student, must reevaluate sites and their ability to fulfill prior commitments (CAS 2015). Artifacts from this process can be used in assessments of the department's internship program (CAS 2015).

Finally, some administrative responsibilities should be assumed by department faculty or instructors to ensure fairness, equal and universal access, safety, standardized practices, assessments of the program at the departmental or institutional level, and a program that is well-integrated in the university (CAS 2015). Faculty coordinators should know the legal parameters and ramifications for transgressions; they should know whom to contact if harassment or other legal issues arise (Diamond-Welch and Hetzel-Riggin 2018; and see Chapter 3 by Yamada in this book). Internship coordinators are responsible for helping students prepare to apply for and work in internships, which often means developing, distributing, or connecting to guides or videos for résumé and cover letter writing, email etiquette and professional conduct; to handbooks containing other information about practical or legal matters; or directing students to appropriate campus staff (Eyler and Giles 1999; Kolb 1984). If career centers do not offer mock interviews, faculty might also require prospective student interns to rehearse with their peers, an exercise that could include recording mock interviews and reviewing them together (Gavigan 2010).

A career center or other campus coordinator may be charged with identifying and screening political science-related/public affairs internship providers, developing and maintaining lists of reliable placements, and cultivating relationships with community members, but departments also have a long-term interest in taking those steps (True 2011). Renewable lists of placements should embrace a wide range of opportunities—including political office, urban or city government agencies, regional or special governments, public policy-oriented nonprofits, and law firms. If these lists are maintained by the department, the listings should be able to accommodate any student majoring or minoring in the department (CAS 2015; see Supplemental Internship Resources for sample items to include in a database).[17]

In some low-density opportunity areas (e.g., small towns) where few public agencies are located, there are several ways to accommodate political science students. Based on his study of a long-running internship program in a small city, Anderson (2014) recommends that students, wherever they are placed, concentrate on examining how an organization's structure, process, and outcomes enable or inhibit the attainment of public and political goals (2014, 865), and this approach could be taken at for-profit enterprises if the position is designed intentionally and well, especially if no public affairs positions can be found in the community (Chapter 14 by Božović and McCartney contains a guide for pursuing this option). Alternatively, virtual or remote internships represent educational opportunities that continue to expand in number, and on-campus internships with a policy focus could also be cultivated to accommodate students who have limited resources—but this practice is not without its critics.[18] Scott-Clayton (2017), for example, recommends creating internships that replace off-campus jobs "with more academically-compatible on-campus ones" (1), because these have the added benefits of increasing student retention and program completion, particularly for students who are cash-strapped or have limited transportation options. Likewise, Fede, Gorman, and Cimini (2018) conclude that "stu-

dent employment that incorporates aspects of experiential education in a […] university position with time spent in the community appears to be beneficial for undergraduates from a wide range of academic disciplines" (121).

Finally, unequal access to high-quality internship opportunities continues to disadvantage many students who would benefit from an internship but face high financial barriers or arbitrary academic hurdles (Jones, Win, and Vera 2020). As Hora (2019) writes,

> Too many students lack the financial resources, social connections and time to find and pursue an internship. Our research shows that, of the students who have not had an internship, 64% wanted to but could not because of: 1) the need to work at their current job, 2) a heavy course load, 3) a lack of opportunities in their field and 4) insufficient pay. That those obstacles disproportionately impact low-income and working students, for whom an internship may be an especially important vehicle for social mobility, should raise red flags for campus leaders (2019, n.p.).

Echoing these points, Mallinson (in Chapter 11, this volume) and Gelbman, Gentry, and Van Vechten (2015) also argue that inequalities among students can be reinforced when programs require internships without regard for the accessibility of sites, the quality of the experience, or the unintended consequences of diverting students from paid work. Instead of encouraging the "best and brightest" to complete internships, a practice that simply reifies disparities that graduates will carry into their careers, equity demands that institutions find ways to accommodate all students who desire to complete a high-quality internship; best practices involve taking deliberate steps to ease undue strains. Unless institutions and departments can marshal enough resources to offset these inequities by identifying paid internships, rewarding placements that are either close to or on campus, locating or supplying student scholarships, subsidies, or grants, then internships should not be a required curricular element.

As this review of the literature demonstrates, the implementation of a quality, effective, academic internship program from beginning to end requires careful preparation, intentionality, communication, sustained commitment, appropriate compensation and resources, and regular assessment on the part of *all* internship partners. Stakeholders—meaning universities or college administrations, departments, students, and providers—must partner to achieve the best possible outcomes, foremost among them *learning* that is deep, impactful, and lasts a lifetime. Success is ultimately shaped by a surplus of factors, and some of the conditions that influence success in different settings are examined in the chapters that follow. The evidence-based practices explored in subsequent pages are clearly rooted in a body of scholarship replete with empirical and practical insights that can help students—and their faculty mentors and site supervisors—realize the educational potential of internship experiences.

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# ENDNOTES

1. In this chapter, the terms *experiential learning* and *internships* are used interchangeably (unless otherwise noted).

2. Survey responses tend to center on students' self-reported gains. Student-level data tend to be grade-point averages (GPA) and graduation rates. Mixed-methods studies pepper the literature in addition to a few comparative, longitudinal studies in the area of internships (not in abundance, however). Lowenthal and Sosland (2007) is a good example of a mixed-methods, comparative study of internships (in Washington, DC).

3. Kuh (2008) defines "historically underserved" as underrepresented minority, first-generation, transfer, and low-income students.

4. In their review of internship program webpages and course outlines, Stirling et al. (2017) find that most internship programs emphasize the first two stages rather than the linking of theory with practice, and they argue that political science departments should design programs that will promote more comprehensive coverage of these stages. As described by Auerbach in Chapter 7, research internships are promising examples of such programming.

5. These criteria are articulated in Lowenthal and Sosland (2007).

6. Others include the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education.

7. Although standards for internship programs have been developed at the professional association level and periodically revisited "through a consensus model of member associations and other experts" (for CAS that has been a 30-year process; see Introduction, CAS 2015), extant work exploring the impact of these standards remains thin, and coverage of political science internships has been infrequent.

8. AAC&U also enumerate 16 Essential Learning Outcomes "that all students need for success in work, citizenship, and life" (2021, n.p.): "The VALUE rubrics include Inquiry and Analysis, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Written Communication, Oral Communication, Quantitative Literacy, Information Literacy, Reading, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Civic Knowledge and Engagement—Local and Global, Intercultural Knowledge and Competence, Ethical Reasoning and Action, Global Learning, Foundations and Skills for Lifelong Learning, and Integrative Learning."

9. For example, critical thinking, which they define as the ability to "identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information," would manifest in behaviors such as making decisions and solving problems using sound, inclusive reasoning and judgment; gathering and analyzing information from diverse sources and individuals to fully understand a problem; accurately summarizing and interpreting data with an awareness of personal (and other) biases that may impact outcomes; and so forth (2021).

10. Their sample includes over 442,000 students from 619 institutions of higher education in the United States. They estimate internships' impacts on academic performance, human and social capital gains, satisfaction with the college experience, and post-graduation goals and plans. Using a method of propensity score matching, they conclude that "many of the benefits of internship participation would be underestimated if the effects of discontinuous college tenure were not accounted for" (Routon and Walker 2018, 1).

11. According to Kilgo, Ezell Sheets, and Pascarella (2015, 513): "The overall sample in the study consisted of incoming first-year students at 17 four-year colleges and universities located in 11 different states from four general regions of the United States. Of the original sample of 4,193 students who participated in the late summer/early fall 2006 testing, 2,212 participated in the spring 2010 follow-up data collection [four years later], for a response rate of 52.8%. These students represented approximately 10% of the total population of incoming first-year students at the 17 participating institutions."

12. Students at the Wagner College on Staten Island, NY, learn through the "Wagner Plan," which is designed to cultivate "lifelong learners and active members of their professional communities" (Aldas et al. 2010, n.p.). Students in each class annually experience learning through research projects, service learning, field trips, and internships.

13. Bradberry and DeMaio write: "Of our survey respondents who entered Cal State University Northridge as first-time freshmen (FTF), 77% of the Model United Nations (MUN) students and 58% of the Judicial Internship Program (JIP) students graduated in 4 years or less. These numbers are well above the university average of 15% for FTF graduating in 4 years or less, and the national average of 40% for all institutions and 35% for public institutions […] However, it not correct that the students admitted are predominantly students with

> the highest GPAs. In fact, in MUN, there is no GPA requirement to apply. […]Among the applicants for both programs, there is a variation in GPAs, majors, courses taken, and their overall level of preparation. […] As a result, while we are not claiming a causal relationship or that participation in MUN or JIP alone leads to higher graduation rates, it is undisputed that these programs provide: external motivation for students to stay on track; positive peer influence, camaraderie, and support; and mentorship from faculty coordinators, judges, diplomats, and other professionals—all of which students are far less likely to receive in a traditional classroom setting" (2019: 103).

14. We note that the language used in CAS standards is "*shall*" versus "*must,*" deliberately conveying a sense of necessity; here we opt to use "should" and "must."

15. The objectives identified in the tables are both explicitly and implicitly recognized as incentivizing action around experiential education (CAS 2015; Hocking, Brown and Harzing 2004; Kuh 2008; NACE 2021; True 2011).

16. Many of these focus on political science interns specifically, but some include social science majors, and others are studies of undergraduates that have been cited in the political science internship literature.

17. Note that students who are not majoring or minoring in political science should also be able to access these opportunities (and many do, especially if these placements might enable them to achieve their learning goals), but the department's primary obligation is to deliver a curriculum for its majors.

18. Conflicts of interest, limited scope, and limited exposure to the community (external to campus) are possible constraints that make on-campus positions less desirable than off-campus ones.