

# Exploring Student Reflections Towards an Agricultural Internship



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## Abstract

Internships have largely been used as an effective hands-on learning tool, exposing college students to an array of occupational skills and expectations in hopes of creating prepared individuals for the workforce. Developing a better understanding of recent intern perceptions about their lived experience could help to construct a deeper appreciation between the connectedness of the participant's perception and the internship experience. The purpose of this study was to explore the reflections and attitudes of undergraduate students who completed an agricultural internship to gain useful insights to internship elements concerning internship programming, student learning, and preparation for future career endeavors. This qualitative study employed three data collection methods: descriptive survey, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and document analysis. Each intern had a unique internship and provided insight into how internships could be more effective. Student interns valued their professional internship experience

while acknowledging the personal and professional benefits gained because of completing the experience.

*Keywords:* internships, agriculture, reflections, undergraduate education

Currently in the United States, there is a shortage of skilled workers in the agricultural field (Donca, 2018; Goecker et al, 2015). Obtaining and training skilled individuals to fill positions within the agricultural industry is critical in addressing the current and future agricultural workforce demands. One way to potentially address this issue and increase the number of skilled workers in agriculture is through internships (Coco, 2000; Harrison & Kennedy, 1996; Pepper, 2012).

Internships have been utilized as a formal instructional process within post-secondary agricultural programs for over a century and have long been a part of agricultural

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vocational training (LaPrad, 1977). Internship programs are now at nearly every major institution and often found among leading agricultural companies around the country (U.S News and World Report, 2017). As an increasing number of students enter colleges of agriculture (FAEIS, 2013) and take advantage of internship programs, it becomes more relevant for colleges of agriculture to design internship programs based on research, and informed by previous intern experiences. Over the past two decades, internships have become a tool to connect students who are shifting from academia to the professional world and have helped increase career experience among graduating college students (Coco, 2000; Divine et al., 2007).

Literature has highlighted the benefits of agricultural internships. For example, internships enhance necessary workplace skills such as career decision-making, communication, self-awareness, and technical competence (Anderson, 2015; Bailey et al., 2000; Binder et al., 2015; Brooks et al., 1995; Coco, 2000; Knouse & Fontenot, 2008; Krieshok et al., 2009). Additionally, internships allow students to explore a particular occupational experience without fully committing and assuming the risks and challenges associated with a traditional employment position (Stichman & Farkas, 2005; Coco, 2000). Studies have shown that agricultural internships among agriculture majors are beneficial because they provide relevant experiences, opportunities to engage with real-world problems, and understanding of the importance of teamwork in the workplace (Jones et al., 2002).

Previous agricultural internship studies have focused primarily on perspectives of participating faculty and industry leaders in an attempt to analyze the academic qualities, the importance, or value of the internship program (Bruening & Shao, 2005; Farias, 2016; Morgan, 2009; Wu, 2001). While these perspectives provide valuable insight to the internship experience, it is beneficial to seek the student's perspective on the experience as well (Garkovich et al., 2016; Greene, 1994; Ross & Elechi, 2002; Stake, 1978). Very few studies (e.g., Corder, 2017; Stedman et al., 2006) have examined agriculture internships utilizing qualitative approaches that focus on the lived experience and overall satisfaction from the perspective of the student. Depicting the nuances of a perceived successful internship experience and communicating how that experience translates into career readiness can begin to answer the call from industry to fill the growing divide between qualified graduates and career opportunities (Callahan & Benzing, 2004).

This study sought to explore post-secondary agriculture internships from the intern's perspective to understand the impact of internships on career decisions, and to provide additional guidance on the benefits and challenges of internship programs. Specifically, how do students who complete an internship describe their agricultural internship experience?

## Methods

We framed this study in a constructivist lens, which affords for the learner to actively construct their personal knowledge and understanding from their own unique experiences and backgrounds (Brown, 2008; Fosnot, 2013; Piaget, 1973; Steffe & Gale, 1995). Employing this perspective allowed us to explore and organize underlying meanings and themes shared by the distinctive and individual perspective of each participant about their internship experiences.

As part of a larger inquiry, this qualitative study utilized a phenomenological design approach (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Five students participated in this study. We used purposeful sampling methods to identify appropriate participants desired for this study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990). Criteria for inclusion in this study included students enrolled in an internship during their junior or senior year at Oregon State University who completed an internship during the 2016-2017 academic school year. We collected data in the summer of 2017. We narrowed the criteria for potential participants who were juniors or seniors at the time of the internship because they were closer to making career choices, a factor more closely aligned with the purpose of this study. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before data collection began.

## Description of the Participants and Context

Participants were asked to develop a pseudonym at the beginning of the study to help with anonymity. Of the five participants, three were female and two were male. One participant had decided to earn their degree after working in a career for several years. All participants were students studying in Agricultural Sciences. All participants knew they wanted to enter an agricultural career but were uncertain about a specific job, however, three participants knew they wanted to enter a career in plant science, one in animal science, and one on education/communication. Two participants had previously completed more than one internship prior to the one being inquired about in this study. Three participants completed an internship in the state where they attended the university, while one completed an out-of-state internship, and another completed an international internship.

Participants completed internships with differing foci that served different sectors within agriculture. The five agriculture internship sites were described by participants as trucking logistics and hauling, plant science research lab, hog and potato farm, fruit farming and sales, and greenhouse/landscape maintenance.

At the time of the study, Oregon State University had the largest agricultural college in the state and serviced students from multiple states who choose to earn a bachelor's degree in Agriculture. The University also had an internet-based distance learning option for students from all over the world to enroll in while pursuing various agricultural majors. The agricultural college educates over 2,600 undergraduate students with about 400 majoring in Agricultural Sciences as of summer of 2017. The Agricultural Sciences major did

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not require an internship experience as part of the degree, although it was strongly encouraged by the department.

The agriculture internship program discussed in this study was offered during the summer quarter. Student interns could enroll in the internship course and select between 1 – 12 units based on the number of projected hours to be worked. Students met with the departmental internship adviser who discussed course expectations and logistics. Students were asked to generate two to three personalized learning objectives for their internship experience. The majority of the information for interns was frontloaded in preparing the student for the experience and capturing internship site information. Once the student began their internship, students were required to complete weekly updates through an on-line platform which typically involved several prompts and check-in questions. Lastly, at the conclusion of the internship, student interns were asked to develop a final presentation to highlight their internship experiences.

The agriculture internship program was overseen and graded by the departmental academic advisor. The advisor managed the on-line class and corresponded with each student intern and communicated with the onsite internship supervisor when needed. The advisor also oversaw all required paperwork and ensured forms and paperwork were completed by the intern. Internship supervisors were responsible for providing mentoring and guidance for the student while working in a safe environment.

### Data collection and analysis

Data collection for this study consisted of three phases as a means of triangulation: a one-on-one semi structured interview, a descriptive Likert-type survey, and document analysis. The purpose of the descriptive survey and the document analysis in this study was not to create claims or conclusions; rather, it was to be used as a comparative source to support the findings from the interviews, and to build credibility and validity through triangulation using two other sources of data (Park et al., 2016).

The semi-structured one-on-one interview with each participant consisted of a series of questions addressing topics about their internship experience. Internship completers were asked to reflect on their own learning, the structure and delivery of the internship, and to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the overall lived experience. We developed a moderator's guide consisting of eight major questions and potential follow-up questions, which was generated from a synthesis of literature paired with a university evaluation of previous internships (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Sample questions included, "Please describe the role of and interaction with individuals who were part of your overall internship experience." "Did any of these individuals influence the way you felt about your internship experience?" "Explain any challenges, if any, you might have encountered through your internship process?" and "Please describe any successes, if any, you might have had through your internship process." We asked participants to articulate their thoughts to elicit insights and meaning behind what was uniquely perceived through their internship

experience. Follow-up questions were asked to elicit more information from the participants. The lead researcher served as the moderator for the one-on-one interviews and took observational notes during the interview process. The interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes each.

The descriptive survey consisted of three sections with a total of 21 questions eliciting information about 1) the individual participants, 2) the participants' internship experience, and 3) the characteristics of the internships. The specific purpose of these questions was to provide context and solidify themes from participant interviews regarding how internship responsibility, rigor, supervisor interaction, and personal growth played a factor in overall helpful or restrictive outcomes. We also examined departmental internship documents as a comparative source to support the emergent themes from the participant interviews. The departmental internship documents included a variety of forms and documents that each intern would have read or completed at some point during the internship and included: *General Informational Internship Guide*; *Internship Course Application form*; *Student's Learning Objectives form*; *Detailed Timeline*; *Weekly Reflection Prompts and Reports*; and the *Final Presentation and Rubric form*. All of these documents were provided to the students when they enrolled in the internship course. Analyzing these documents provided us with information that was not provided through the survey or the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, thus providing context, background, and perspective to other collected data.

The specific focus of analysis in this study was on the individual student agriculture internship completer, not the internship program itself. We read and re-read transcripts and documents and analyzed and re-analyzed survey data allowing us to formulate ideas on how the collected data were interconnected. Brief summaries and field notes were included alongside numerical and written data to capture primary thoughts, which would eventually lead to the initial codes and categories. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. We analyzed and coded the data using open and axial coding protocols for thematic content as outlined by Creswell & Poth (2017), Merriam (2009), Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), Moustakas (1994), and Benner (1985), and using the qualitative software program NVivo. The lead researcher performed the initial coding process conducting constant checks for accuracy and reliability in coding with senior qualitative researchers at Oregon State University.

### Bias, Rigor and Trustworthiness

We involved the research participants in checking and approving the initial findings to reduce researcher bias (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Member checking was used to verify themes and meanings shared by each participant. All five research participants were represented in the validation attempt. After reading each transcription several times and taking notes on ideas shared, we summarized each transcription and then e-mailed the individual summary to each respective participant asking each respondent to provide

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feedback on how precise we were, exploring the accuracy of our interpretations of the data collected through the interview process (Birt et al., 2016). We established rigor and trustworthiness through measures of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Harrison et al., 2001). We collected and analyzed multiple sources of data for triangulation (Stake, 2008), kept a reflexive journal; utilized member checking; employed thick, rich descriptions; maximized participant variation through purposeful sampling; established an audit trail; and created a data bank for referencing (Anney, 2014, Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1982; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2008).

### Results

This research sought to understand how student agriculture internship completers describe their agricultural internship experience. Seven research themes emerged from the data: previous experiences, hands-on learning, independent skill development, future career preparation, learning incentives, feedback, and personal goals.

#### Theme 1: Previous Experience

Participants perceived their previous experience as helpful as they progressed through their internship. They discussed the realization the internship had on their own personal and professional identities. Each participant shared their different upbringing, lifestyle, and worldviews. Two interns hailed from a non-agricultural background providing them a perceived challenge to enter into an agricultural internship. Antonia shared,

I'm from a city and so that frame of reference between me and people from more rural backwards is a little bit of a hurdle...integrating myself into a community that was different than what I was used to values-wise and perspective-wise.

Ed described the lack of previous experiences in agriculture but excitement as a result of the internship. Ed said, "I am an Agricultural Science undergrad and I come from an area that doesn't have agriculture . . . and I want to explore this deeper." Most of the participants struggled with their non-agriculture identity and saw that as an obstacle to their learning. Other participants realized they were no longer seen as an equal as they were used to in their circle of friends or family. Participants wrestled with their status in the workplace, and they communicated being worried about what others thought about them. Austin depicted these sentiments, "The biggest challenge was feeling like an entry level person on the team coupled with a language barrier." The majority of respondents mentioned that by the end, they developed a sense of pride in their internship and workplace. Austin stated,

When I got home from my internship, just to simply look back and having that sense of pride that I was able to set up an experience to travel, live on a farm where I knew nobody and didn't speak the same language...

Each one of the participants indicated their internship

was physically demanding and were not accustomed to this type of work. Antonia said, "I've never worked on my feet that long, for such an extended period of time and it's like a unique toll on my body I guess." They followed up by stating, "Getting up at 4:30 every morning was a challenge."

#### Theme 2: Hands-on Learning

Every participant described the value of the learning opportunities offered through their internships. They felt this type of learning was effective and allowed them to apply their knowledge quicker than limited learning in the classroom. Three interns described the moment in their internship where what they were physically doing suddenly linked with a concept they learned in their academic setting (Cannon & Arnold, 1998). Three of the participants connected their hands-on learning experiences to potential future applications. All participants valued the varied and genuine applied aspects that their agriculture internship sites offered and encouraged, and the confidence it built in them. CJ stated,

This was nice. If I was doing something I didn't have any experience with prior to doing it there, I guess it built my confidence a little bit. Just trying it out for my own, and then seeing that I could do a lot of things that I didn't know how to do before.

Austin stated,

...having that first-hand and what production agriculture really is, rewards me. Now that I am in agricultural education, when I talk to people about production agriculture, I have a real-life story to make them go, 'Wow, I can see what you mean.'"

Participants expressed how their internship enabled them to experience authentic work experiences they never could have gotten at the university. Antonia stated, "I could speak to the value of experiential learning for a decade... but I think it is valuable in that I was offered a legitimate employment opportunity in conjunction to earning internship credit." Lisa added, "To have that hands-on experience and access to high-tech equipment that's hundreds of thousands of dollars that normally you wouldn't have access to...so much hands-on learning in such a short amount of time was really valuable."

Participants expressed how they enjoyed having varied responsibilities and outcomes as they progressed through the internship process, which helped them see multiple aspects of future careers. CJ said, "It was everything from start to finish production, and then selling it at the farm stand." Alternatively, two participants spoke to the limited variation in job tasks, which led to boredom and monotony.

#### Theme 3: Future Career Preparation

All participants shared an array of reasons on why they decided to enter into an internship, but each one related to career preparation. Ed described how the internship helped him understand exactly what the career expectations were: "At least I explored, and I know what it takes... I now know what is expected of me and how it works, and for me, I got

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to learn by doing it.” Participants spoke of the agricultural internship as a valuable experience that helped prepare them for the future. Austin stated, “It was a valuable experience participating in an internship...whether it was international or domestic, I would recommend it to anybody.” Lisa stated,

There was a lot of value just learning how to manage the day in and day out responsibilities and still have the energy at the end of the day to go to farmers’ market and smile and sell what you picked all day because you’re exhausted.” . . . “It was pretty revealing to me that that’s not what I want to do for the long-term.

CJ mentioned accessibility to employers while in college as a major reason for entering an internship: “... That’s one of the reasons why I actually transferred to the university. I wanted to be able to have access to employers that I did not have access to while out in the community college system.” Ed talked about long-term career goals and how the internship connected to that goal. Ed stated, “What lured me to that [internship] position was working with Latino farmers.” Other participants discussed gaining work experience and building career skills as driving forces for the internship. Ed said, “You want to be able to experience that work before entering a career.”

Four participants also appreciated how the hands-on nature of the internship taught them how to solve problems in the workplace. Ed stated,

My internship has really changed how I look at different problems or a task that I am given, I don’t look at tasks and say, okay, how have we always done this and how do I do it in the same way that we’ve always done it.

### Theme 4: Learning Incentives

While most participants knew about obvious incentives such as earning credit for completing the agriculture internship with high marks, building a resume, and establishing a strong industry reference, there were other learning incentives that surprised some participants during the experience. For example, Antonia talked about respect and being a member of a team. She stated, “I like the base level of respect, of like you’re my employee. You’re a member of the team. I’m going to compensate you for what you are worth, while also providing you a learning environment.” Many of the incentives created a perception felt need to learn and perform better. Two participants shared that their learning and performance was maximized because they were receiving financial compensation for their work, Lisa stated:

Pursuing an internship allowed me to continue to work toward my educational goal . . . and gain experience at the same time . . . it allowed me to focus on my learning and not to worry about how I’m going to pay the bills and how I am going to pay the rent. Ya, it allowed me to focus on the learning and not worry about the money.

### Theme 5: Feedback

Participants enjoyed having their supervisor provide supportive feedback and allowed for time to discuss questions or ideas. Interns also discussed their appreciation when their supervisors took time to demonstrate a specific task and allowed clarifying questions while asking the intern to exhibit competency for the task before being left alone to complete the job. Participants felt they learned the best after instructions were given, when they were allowed to test, try, and discover on their own.

All participants mentioned feedback and support from their internship supervisor and or other co-workers as a source of learning and mentoring. Four participants shared their satisfaction about their internship supervisors who taught them but allowed the intern to make mistakes and learn from them. CJ stated, “I liked the fact that it [supervision] was a lot of ‘hands-off’ in my learning. I had instructors in the past who were more of the micromanaging type, so for me this was nice.” Antonia said, “Ya it was really hands off, but I liked that. I don’t like being micro-managed.” Ed stated, “I felt like it would be great if my mentor would be able to be there, but at the same time, there are other people there to fill that void.”

Participants found work to be more enjoyable when they were given clear objectives with a meaningful purpose. Many of the interns stated their appreciation for clarity from their supervisors with regard to expectations, but also how they appreciated the autonomy and trust given by their supervisors. Antonia stated,

It was very clear what she wanted me to do every day and what the goal was and what my duties were, but once we’d establish those and were clear, she left me alone . . . I liked it because I like the inherent trust of, I trust you to do it and do it right and do it well.

Participants also shared how they liked receiving positive feedback from their supervisors. They expressed how this positive feedback through affirmations increased their productivity and self-worth. Ed stated:

It was a reinforcing feeling, like they believed in me, even though, I was a new person there. They just handed me paperwork and said, ‘ok, you’re going to figure this out.’ For that I felt like they had confidence in me so that made me feel like I’m capable.

Interns were not only supportive of receiving feedback of any kind; they desired it. Feedback provided each intern several elements within their learning process. Ed explained,

They would go out of their way to explain something to me a little bit more in depth where they knew I was there to learn. There are things I might not ever do again, but it will add value to me to fully understand.

Throughout the interviews, participants referred back to when their supervisor discussed their performance, whether that was when they were pulled aside and verbally provided feedback, allowed to read written feedback, or a casual few words in passing. They often discussed feedback meetings as a way to see how they were perceived within the company.

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Feedback provided interns with clarity in how there were completing tasks, which was a very important aspect to the interns. Antonia shared, “The external validation piece really helped...even the casual personal validation from truckers and my supervisor that enjoyed working with me. My supervisor especially was really satisfied with the work I was doing.” For many of the participants, this was their first internship, so to be provided feedback from the supervisor gave them performance checkpoints to which they could build and learn. Inversely, Ed shared about the common absence of his supervisor who did not provide timely communication or feedback. He stated, “I felt probably the most restrictive part was the particular style of my mentor. The feedback wasn’t immediate.” The lack of feedback was challenging for the participant, but he discussed adapting to this style by bringing in other employees to fill this role.

### Theme 6: Independent Skill Development

Three participants shared specific things they learned from their agriculture internship, which seemed to be very dependent on internship site and responsibilities. Ed shared how he gained skills related to working in teams and being flexible, skills that he believes will help him in his future career. He stated,

I think there was plenty of things that I learned how to do and got better at doing these with regards to working with a team of people where I had my job and they had their jobs, but we all relied on each other. I think there was plenty of skill development there that I can speak to when pursuing another job, and that I think made me a bit more flexible – more flexible as a team member I guess.

Three participants also expressed their frustration in lack of skill development from their internship because they were given repetitive tasks each day without new tasks added. Antonia said,

I really had to do some mental gymnastics in order to reflect every week on what I was learning because I was doing the same thing every day. So I guess that was a challenging and maybe restrictive on my learning.

The participants felt they had mastered their position within a couple weeks, where others who had a multi-faceted approach to their internship seemed to develop an increased amount of technical and intra-personal skills. “It really pushed me outside my comfort zone to go someplace that I’ve never been to where I knew anybody. I pushed myself in something that I didn’t know, which was a huge success because I did it,” Austin shared.

All participants gained important insight about potentially negative aspects of a future career. Two participants discussed the challenge in working with other people that do not share the same work ethic, worldview, or social skills. Antonia expressed this notion by sharing, “There’s going to be people that you don’t necessarily mesh with. So, I guess that was a valuable learning experience of doing the job even if a person annoys the hell out of you.” Through the internship, participants described how they identified aspects of a future career they may not enjoy or may find

challenging, but how it was good for them to experience it. Antonia supported this notion sharing, “It’s just as valuable to learn what you don’t want to do, as to learn what you want to do.” Ed stated,

Having to go through the whole process, sitting down with the board and convincing them that we should have a space so we could conduct our trials, it was exciting...I felt like I was, Ok, this is what it takes to be an extension agent.

### Theme 7: Personal Goals

All five participants indicated they developed personal goals prior to starting their internship. Personal goals ranged from wanting to gain practical hands-on experience, becoming more credible in the industry, progressing their degree with enrolled internship credits, and preparing for a future career. Lisa shared, “It really provided me with some experimental learning that also helped me move toward that educational goal.” She continued by expressing how her goals guided her accomplishments, “Knowing that I could confidently handle things on my own after direction was valuable. It certainly contributed to more confidence.” Establishing personal goals may allow participants to have a clearer path towards maximizing their learning. Establishing learning outcomes/goals seemed to be important for the interns, but they also appreciated that the goals could be modified during the experience. Antonia shared her experience having to develop her own personal goals each day because she did not feel challenged anymore in her static position:

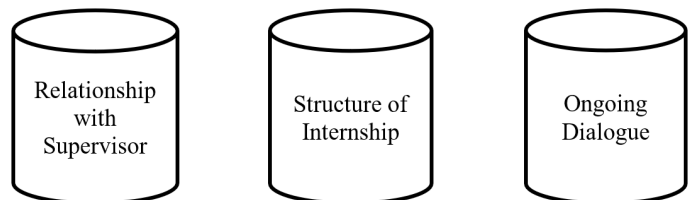
I wanted to be able to identify different kinds of straw grass. Like I want to be able to immediately know what I’m working with and I very quickly became able to do just that through doing the job every day...In the beginning of the summer I had those solid legitimate learning outcomes.

## Discussion

The findings from this study produced seven themes, which we have organized and grouped into three major pillars of internship development: 1) relationship with supervisor, 2) structure of internship, and 3) ongoing dialogue (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

*8 Point bold Example Title italicized*



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### Relationship with Supervisor

This study has highlighted the important influence that supervisors have on the success of internships. Our findings suggest that interns felt more valued and trusted when the supervisor gave increased independence and responsibly, which allowed them to feel more comfortable to learn and discover independently. It is possible that having a supportive supervisor leads to increased personal growth and internship satisfaction. Perhaps the reason interns increased their confidence and technical skills was a result of feeling that they worked in a safe environment and felt comfortable asking questions to their supervisor.

Participants spoke about their supervisors as an influential facet of their learning experience but also communicated some frustration when clear expectations were not conveyed or when not given a chance to expand on existing knowledge. Building an initial relationship between the agriculture internship program and supervisor could contribute to a more purposeful matching of intern and site supervisor. Consideration for supervisor quality, such as screening potential supervisors, might be an important step in providing high quality agricultural internship programs. Although this would lead to increased time invested, it could prove to be largely beneficial when thinking about the long-term effects of the overall experience (Cannon & Arnold, 1998).

### Structure of Internship

Participants realized that the opportunity to apply classroom concepts or newly acquired skills directly into the workplace provided a sense of confidence and preparation for their future careers (Inkster & Ross, 1995). The internship expectations fell short for some participants, likely due to the internship structure. Learning seems to be minimized when interns were asked to constantly repeat similar tasks. Interns expressed their desire to be challenged. Most participants indicated there were some facets of their internship responsibilities that felt meaningless and they were asked to work under unclear objectives (Meyer et al., 2002). These internal feelings of confusion may have contributed to the two participants in this study responding with a neutral opinion towards their internship satisfaction compared to their counterparts.

Our findings suggest that a well-rounded multi-faceted agriculture internship opportunity provided interns with developmental progression and acquired employment experiences, which aided in bolstering their career decision-making confidence. Allowing interns to move within the company to experience the various aspects should provide more of a holistic vantage point on how business is operated. Participants who experienced a multi-faceted structure valued their internship. In contrast, our findings suggest that when interns perform similar tasks day after day, it can lead to boredom and disengagement.

Internships often offer financial compensation to the intern for work provided. Participants in this study appreciated financial compensation because it allowed them to stay more focused (e.g., not have to worry about

extra jobs to pay for living expenses). This seemed to play an important role in two of the participants, as they felt their learning was maximized as a result.

### Ongoing Dialogue

Participants in this study seemed to learn and develop from the supportive supervisor who was willing to provide constructive feedback and guidance. This study posits that by having a supportive supervisor, interns can have increased personal growth and heightened career awareness. Interns appreciated having an understanding supervisor and benefited from ongoing conversations with them. Dialogue between interns and supervisors can be thought of as guiding the intern through expectations, collaboration, and providing conceptual clarity as interns continue to build their own professional identity.

While some interns benefit from a supportive and engaged supervisor, others often do not receive the same support. Our findings suggest that pairing an intern with a less-effective supervisor (e.g., overworked, lack of mentorship) could lead to a lack of opportunity, career interest, and growth for the intern (Narayanan et al., 2010). Our findings suggest that interns thrive on feedback that enables them to understand how their performance and behavior is perceived by their supervisor.

### Recommendations

While this research shed light on internship dynamics, questions still remain about the lived experiences of all stakeholders in the internship experience. To help establish a three-dimensional understanding of agricultural internships and elucidate gaps for improvement, more qualitative research is recommended focusing on the lived experience of internship supervisors and coordinators. We also recommend that researchers visit agriculture internship worksites while the intern is actively engaged on tasks. This type of ethnographic research could allow a researcher to gather data from a different perspective while observing a participant in action within their work environment. This could lead to findings that are difficult to gather through off-site interviews or surveys. Lastly, we recommend similar research be conducted on internship completers who are established in a profession. This could provide data depicting how past internship experiences have influenced professional identity, career decisions, and career commitment.

Based on our findings, we recommend the following for internship programs: 1) trainings for supervisors should be developed; 2) financial compensation for interns should be considered; 3) program administrators should communicate early with supervisors and interns; 4) a systematic intern performance evaluation for supervisors should be developed to be completed on a regular basis; 5) a purposeful screening/training or dialogue with internship supervisors should be developed to assist in creating a more effective experience for the intern; and 6) assessments should be implemented to bolster the knowledge of the intern toward similar career opportunities. We also recommend the following

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for supervisors of interns: 1) an experience should be developed that allows the intern to be involved in numerous aspects of workplace, ensuring tasks and challenges are followed with clear and meaningful expectations; and 2) increased regularity of feedback should be required by the supervisor.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the reflections and attitudes of undergraduate students who completed an agricultural internship to gain useful insights to internship elements concerning internship programming and student learning. Based on our findings, we conclude that the relationship between the interns and the supervisor is a hinge point for overall perceived growth, success, and confidence among internship completers. It is extremely important that there is deliberate consideration when pairing interns with supervisors. While the findings are not generalizable beyond the scope of this study, we suggest the findings of this study have highlighted how institutions of higher education can develop improved agriculture internship programs that will continue to provide students with intentional experiences that provide career exposure to students prior to graduation.

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