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Advocating for Experiential Learning Programs as Change Agents in Higher Education: Imagining a Justice Orientation that Centers Students and Partners while Enriching Practice

Patrick M. Green

Loyola University Chicago, pgreen@luc.edu

Theresa Castor

University of Wisconsin-Parkside, castor@uwp.edu

Dale J. Leyburn

Nazareth College, dleybur7@naz.edu

Don DeMaria

University of Georgia, demaria@uga.edu

Andres Jaime

Higher Ed International

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Advocating for Experiential Learning Programs as Change Agents in Higher Education: Imagining a Justice Orientation that Centers Students and Partners while Enriching Practice

PATRICK M. GREEN
THERESA CASTOR
DALE LEYBURN
DON DEMARIA
ANDRES JAIME

Loyola University Chicago
University of Wisconsin-Parkside
Nazareth College
University of Georgia
Higher Ed International

The National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) Fellows are academic professionals who engage in a community of practice and explore their practitioner-scholar identity through research and scholarly inquiry into experiential education. During some monthly meetings, the discussion focused on how to infuse equity, diversity, and inclusion in internship programs. The fellows ruminated on strategies to create quality internship programs and how to embed experiential learning opportunities into the curriculum so more students could access them. Collectively, these comments highlight what is not always stated but ever-present; that is, the fellows' justice orientation. The monthly meeting of NSEE Fellows consistently explored our practices with experiential education programs, from internships and working with employers to teaching internship courses. During each meeting, the NSEE Fellows interrogated their practice, raised questions about experiential education programs, and inquired into the most promising approaches that fostered student success in the context of their higher education institutions. The core question that emerged during these meetings became: *What are you advocating for in your experiential education program to foster student success?*

As discussed in depth in the introductory article to this special issue, the NSEE Fellows explored their practitioner-scholar roles as tempered radicals and change agents within the higher education context. They explicitly interrogated their experiential learning practices and emerged with a clear

call to be advocates for change in higher education through experiential learning. Their exploration led to advocating for increased experiential learning opportunities, as well as access and equity for all students.

This lens of advocacy is clearly coupled with a justice orientation. As each fellow inquired into their practice and explored barriers that may limit student participation in experiential learning programs and courses, they also determined specific practices and approaches they sought to incorporate more fully into experiential education to foster student success. In the process of their monthly meetings, independent virtual work, and scholarly exploration, each of the fellows developed specific experiential learning tools to support educators in fostering the changes we hope to see in our field.

This justice orientation encouraged the fellows to identify practices that could be employed in experiential learning programs across the higher education sector (generalizable to many institutions), while addressing issues of equity and access to deepen the student experience in experiential education. To describe these practices and how they address issues of justice in experiential learning, we will draw from the *Imagination for Justice Framework* (Green, 2021), which:

... offers an approach that applies an imagination for justice from the perspectives of pedagogy, practice, program, purpose, and policy. When these aspects of experiential teaching and learning are in relationship with each other, often overlapping and interconnected

... such a justice orientation deepens for student learning through experience. This framework serves as a guide for planning to incorporate justice education into experiential learning and teaching by recognizing the dimensions related to content, delivery, structure, and format. (Green, 2021, p. 4)

The heuristic that emerged from this framework suggests a relationship between these aspects of experiential teaching and learning. As they intersect, student learning is centered and the experience is deepened through the lens of a justice orientation (see Figure 1, Green, 2021, p. 5).

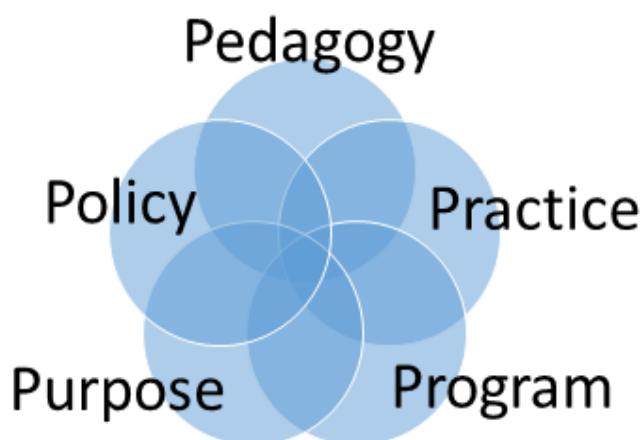


Figure 1. A Framework for an *Imagination for Justice* in Experiential Learning and Teaching (Green, 2021, p. 5)

The following section highlights the recommendations of the NSEE Fellows to enhance student experience and increase equity and access to quality internship opportunities for students. We will analyze each recommendation through the lens of the *Imagination for Justice Framework*, specifically, pedagogy, practice, program, purpose, and policy, in relation to each other and within the context of experiential teaching and learning, as a way, also, to illustrate the multiple approaches to apply an *imagination for justice*. As each NSEE Fellow focused on an area of interest related to internships, we begin with a brief literature overview and a call for more research on the experiences of historically marginalized students. Next, we delve into specific practices to enhance student experiences by facilitating learning-centered internships through articulating learning outcomes and building strong intern-supervisor relationships. Lastly, we broaden the focus to explore variations in work-integrated learning experiences that may address issues of access and equity. Following this analysis, we will introduce the other scholarly articles in this special issue and how they inform the intersections within the *Imagination for Justice Framework* related to experiential teaching and learning. Finally, we will explore how applying such a framework both enriches experiential learning practice through a justice orientation, while working toward facilitating student experiences that foster learning and student success.

A Deeper Understanding of the Experiences and Perceptions of Historically Marginalized Students and Experiential Learning to Guide Justice-Oriented Policies and Programs

Andres Jaime

Attention to the development of effective educational support systems to improve academic and career outcomes for historically marginalized students is an issue of access and justice in higher education as well as an economic issue impacting an expanding skill gap in the national workforce. The examination of experiential learning practices in higher education has been associated with factors conducive to retaining students (Barnes, 2017; Blumenstyk, 2019; Eyler, 2009; Thomas et al., 2017). Yet, research evaluating experiential learning's impact on college persistence and completion for historically marginalized students has received little attention. Experiential learning is associated with environments where students develop a trusting relationship with professors (Cooper, 2013), share a sense of belonging (Perez-Huber et al., 2015), build social networks, and can recognize their lived

experiences as valuable knowledge. These outcomes have been associated with positive academic and career outcomes. However, low retention and graduation rates of students of color and other underserved students are still critical issues across higher education.

Espino (2014) affirms that experiential learning is socially constructed and empowers students to value knowledge based on their lived experiences and improves academic and career outcomes. However, there is a significant gap in the literature concerning research that studies experiential learning theory through the examination of the experiences and perceptions of historically marginalized student populations engaging in experiential learning practices. The limited research related to the impact of experiential learning on historically marginalized students specif-

ically can be associated with the notion of academic inclinations to think of these students from a deficit perspective and to ignore cultural capital embedded in their communities (Yosso, 2005). From the lens of the Imagination for Justice in Experiential Learning and Teaching framework presented earlier, the value of exploring the experiences and perceptions of underserved students when engaging in experiential learning is highlighted by the opportunity to present a knowledge base to re-imagine experiential learning program policy specifically designed and dedicated to support underserved students. Justice-oriented experiential learning policies can allow students of all backgrounds and intersectional identities to view themselves as personally successful, academically empowered, and productive community members (Thomas et al., 2017). Justice-oriented experiential learning policies can guide underserved students through a successful transition from degree attainment to professional success and civic engagement.

Based on the available research on the positive outcomes of experiential learning, it can be assumed that experiential learning that is integrated into curricular and co-curricular activities can positively impact academic persistence and career outcomes of historically marginalized students. Qualitative research on career outcomes related to experiential learning and historically underserved students is also scarce. Thus, the need for research exploring the experiences and perceptions of historically marginalized students and experiential learning can be the voice guiding experiential learning policies that are culturally inclusive and dedicated to contributing to the personal, educational, and professional development of historically marginalized students.

Experiential Learning Theory and Historically Marginalized Students: A Brief History

The historical origins of experiential learning trace back to human relations training developed in the 1940s (Seaman, Brown & Quay, 2017). The innovative concept of experiential learning was born out of the need to address the conflict between interracial and religious leaders in the public and private sector in Connecticut. Psychologist Kurt Lewin led the efforts to resolve these issues through a series of collaborative training sessions called “action research.” These action training sessions focused on a deep understanding of the perceptions of the individuals in the groups involved and facilitation of collaborations between researchers and practitioners to identify solutions to conflict. Before Lewin, in the early 1900s,

pedagogy pioneer John Dewey introduced modern conceptions and theory related to “experience” and “learning by doing” during the era of institutionalized education and industrial democracy (Seaman, Brown & Quay, 2017). Dewey was known for his efforts to improve equity in education for segregated children after the rise of mass schooling. It is important to note that Dewey never used the phrase “experiential learning” as such (Seaman, Brown & Quay, 2017).

One of the most frequently cited and apparently accepted experiential learning frameworks in higher education is Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory and cyclical model. Kolb’s model emphasizes the reflection of new experiences and the development of new concepts to be applied to future experiences. It is important to note that Kolb’s model does not seem to consider unique elements of student identities such as gender or race through this process. The impact of personal student experiences has more recently been considered in experiential learning and teaching theories and practices. In the context of experiential learning, educational interventions, including experiential learning activities, must extend to the individual stories and experiences of each student interacting with the program (Barnes, 2017). Student experiences and perceptions must be the voice guiding policies and program design in education.

Implications of the Student Voice in Experiential Learning Research for Justice-Oriented Policy

Eyler (2009) examines the value of experiential learning in higher education and states that experiential learning activities such as cooperative education and internships are increasingly becoming necessary for job placement after college. Changes in the work sector driven by rapid technological advancement eliminate low-skilled jobs, leaving young people and minority groups particularly vulnerable with possible intergenerational impact (Blumenstyk, 2019). Experiential learning theory does not seem to consider the uniqueness and the strengths of underrepresented students. The literature presents experiential learning theory as a framework that consistently makes assumptions of student behavior and expectations based on western standards.

It is notable to recognize the influence of equity in the early development of experiential learning and the gradual loss of focus on it through time as experiential learning became a more common theory applied in higher education. The positive impact of experiential learning on academic and career outcomes

demonstrated over time has brought an element of human capital to experiential learning and a standard of modern experiential learning theory that seemingly is designed to meet white students' needs. The evolution of experiential learning theory resonates with critical white studies, which is focused on race evasion techniques and advocacy for values associated with the white middle class (Barnes, 2017). Experiential learning has positively impacted students' academic and career outcomes and employment placement in professional fields. However, communities of color are still underrepresented in high-paying occupations and in-demand professions like STEM and other high demand professional career fields.

The existing research on experiential learning theory and its impact on student success outcomes is ample. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that from among classic research theory by Kolb (1984) to studies that

indicate the positive academic and career outcomes of experiential learning (Barnes; 2017; Blumenstyk, 2019; Eyler, 2009; Munoz, Miller & Poole, 2016), only a few studies consider issues of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or disability when discussing the impact of experiential learning on student success outcomes (for an exception see Zilvinskis et al., 2022). The void in the literature that explores the perceptions and lived experiences of historically marginalized students needs to be filled in order to identify patterns, barriers, and experiences of learning. From an Imagination for Justice framework (Green, 2021), the new knowledge emerging from research on this unexplored topic can support the development of a knowledge base to be considered for experiential learning policy development at higher education institutions concerned with providing equitable and effective support to improve academic and career outcomes for historically marginalized students.

Creating Meaningful Learning Outcomes for Internship Coursework

Don DeMaria

Internships have become a ubiquitous part of the collegiate experience and a critical component as post-secondary institutions seek to align career outcomes with the undergraduate curriculum. As stakeholders (parents, students, legislators, etc.) place pressure on colleges and universities to ensure employment after graduation and this experience is commonly viewed as critical by many employers in hiring recent graduates (NACE, 2021), the emphasis on internships has increased. While already common in pre-professional disciplines like business and engineering, internship experiences are expanding into the arts and humanities, providing these disciplines with more concrete career paths within their respective majors.

At my current institution (a large, public research university), I have worked with a wide range of academic majors who were offering internship-based coursework for students engaging in semester-long full-time internships. While it is expected to find disciplinary-based differences in the approaches to designing internship coursework, it also was apparent that the courses had great variation in the depth and complexity of academic work associated with the internship. This ranged from well-developed courses with defined learning outcomes, rigorous assignments, and in-depth reflective work to courses where there was a simple accounting of work hours and a supervisor certification. The latter approach contradicts the body of research that indicates that student learning and development

are enhanced by the inclusion of educationally purposeful activities and intentional learning outcomes. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) (2019) states this plainly:

When course credit is offered for an internship, the amount of credit should be determined by the extent to which the student is engaged in work/activities related to identified learning goals and not solely by hours accrued at the site. (p. 7)

By simply awarding credit based on hours worked and not providing students with opportunities to reflect and engage in deeper learning, Kuh (2008) warns that the internship experience would have "insufficient depth to help students become more sophisticated in their learning over time" (O'Neill, 2010). The development of this resource would provide faculty and internship program directors with the tools to develop learning outcomes/curriculum that would ensure that the internship is indeed "high impact," engaging in what CAS (2019) refers to as a "deliberative form of learning."

Using Available Resources to Define Internship Experience and Learning Outcomes

Unlike other forms of experiential learning, defining an internship can be challenging as it is often viewed differently by academic discipline and major organizations like CAS, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), the National

Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) and others do not share a common definition. While there is no common definition, “Commonalities across the definitions include a reflection component, onsite supervision/guidance, and gaining exposure to a career or furthering one’s interest in a career, (O’Neill, 2010).” The CAS and AAC&U definitions are more fully examined in the following section.

CAS Standards for Internship Programs

There are numerous frameworks that can be referenced when creating learning outcomes. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) is made up of over 40 higher education professional organizations (including NSEE) and has created 47 sets of standards related to various areas of the college student experience, including internships.

CAS effectively details standards regarding all aspects of an internship program from the establishment of a mission statement to facilities and infrastructure. While many aspects of this will be irrelevant to the establishment of learning outcomes, it does provide helpful insights and guidance in a variety of areas. CAS places great emphasis on how multiple units are responsible in ensuring quality internships, noting that Hesser’s (2013) research indicated that all parties involved in an internship experience (student, institution, faculty, supervisor, etc.) share responsibility to ensure that learning outcomes meet rigorous standards to earn academic credit.

CAS (2019) focuses on student learning, development and success in part three of its standards, noting the importance of the intersection between academic coursework and professional experiences:

Internship experiences must provide opportunities for the critical exploration of the relationship between knowledge, concepts, theories and models resulting from the College/university and those from work settings; development of skills, attitudes, values, and interests; and the exploration of career options in a professional setting. (p. 9)

The standards include six steps which the internship program should take in order to ensure a focus on student learning:

- ascertain that tasks or assignments are related to academic, career, professional, and/or personal goals
- confirm that the purpose and the expected

student learning outcomes for the internship are appropriate, relevant, and achievable

- maintain written documentation of the internship goals, objectives, and expected student learning outcomes agreed to by institution personnel, site personnel, and the student
- document and ascertain students’ progress toward achievement of goals, objectives, and learning outcomes
- ensure that students are prepared to engage in and learn from their internship experiences
- build in processes for student self-assessment, reflection, application, and integration of the learning experience, particularly as it relates to students’ (CAS, 2019, p. 9)

These steps require a great deal of planning, constant engagement, feedback, and assessment. This approach also requires greater depth and sophistication in learning design and planning, rather than counting hours worked at an internship site.

Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) High Impact Practices

Using national survey data from the National Survey of Student Engagement, Kuh (2008) identified ten high impact practices, including internships. The ten included in the research were chosen for reported gains in deep learning, student-faculty interactions, academic challenge, collaborative learning and other concepts that enhanced/improved the college experience. When exploring why the ten areas, including internships, were effective, the research cited six reasons:

1. The practices demand students devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks
2. The nature of the high impact practices forces students to interact with faculty and peers on substantive matters
3. Participating in high impact practices increases the likelihood that students will experience diversity
4. Students receive frequent feedback
5. Students see how learning works in different settings

6. These experiences deepens learning and brings one's values and beliefs into awareness (Kuh, 2008, pp. 14-17)

These reasons pointing to the effectiveness of internships (and other high impact practices) again point to a high level of interaction, intentionality, reflection, and feedback for students engaging in effective internships. Along with CAS and other frameworks, these findings provide a roadmap to creating a substantive, rigorous and meaningful internship experience that is grounded in learning outcomes.

It is difficult or potentially impossible to create universal learning outcomes for internship experiences at many or even all institutions. These principles are often grounded in academic disciplines where the same internship experience could have vastly different learning outcomes and pedagogical approaches in each academic department. In lieu of being overly prescriptive, faculty and professional staff working with internships should focus outcomes on both academic learning and professional development, incorporating some general principles that are considered common/best practices when working with internships. Faculty and staff can incorporate the imagination for justice framework in these practices to address issues of equity, access and belonging that can often confront underrepresented students during their internship experiences. The following practices are recommended in the development and implementation of a student internship experience:

- 1. Reflection:** Student learning is enhanced through reflection and feedback. Consider a regular schedule of prompted reflection exercises where students examine issues and also reflect on the impact of their experiences. In designing reflections, faculty and staff can ask students to respond to prompts related to diversity, equity and inclusion by examining personal experiences and also observations of their organization.
- 2. Regular Communication with Students:** Student outcomes are improved when they have greater meaningful interactions with faculty and staff. Regular "check-ins" can help a student feel more supported and also help identify causes for celebration and areas of concern.
- 3. Regular Communication with Employers:** Early in the process, it is essential to communicate learning outcomes and ex-

pectations with employers. While your legal affairs offices can discuss items like internship agreements, faculty and staff overseeing these experiences should make clear the expectations of the work in which a student should engage. One also can use employer interactions to assess what organizations are doing to ensure a diverse workforce, including how they approach issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- 4. Networking:** Students (and almost everyone else) often scoff at the concept of networking. However, professional connections and mentoring are keys to growth. Consider structured opportunities for mentoring where students and professionals can connect. If you have formalized mentoring (where students and mentors are matched), provide some structure (i.e., questions to ask, information to provide ahead of time). Also consider who is mentoring and how you can ensure a diverse mentor "pool." Mentors who can share common experiences can be very effective at helping students navigate a new experience like an internship.
- 5. Assessment and Feedback:** Students, faculty and employers all should provide feedback to each other. Provide a mixture of formal assessment questionnaires with informal check-ins and meetings. Assessments should be designed to incorporate aspects of the imagination for justice framework, examining all five aspects of the framework in relation to the internship experience (policies, pedagogy, practice, purpose and program). With continuous and intentional assessment efforts, faculty and staff become aware of successes and areas of improvement before the end of an experience.

This list, perhaps along with other components, will allow faculty and staff to develop disciplinary and institutional specific learning outcomes for students participating in internship experiences. Within these activities, faculty and staff are able to design components with both an imagination for justice and a desire to enhance the quality and learning of the student experience.

Deepening Engagement and Belonging: Intern-Supervisor Relationship Building

Dale Leyburn

Early on in my role leading a centralized internship program at Nazareth College, I observed that interns who found ways to go beyond completion of the basic duties and responsibilities of their internship made the biggest impact and seemed to have the most profound “lightbulb moments” during the experience. In essence, performance evaluations demonstrated greater performance and impact and reflection submissions were more profound. Performance evaluation data collected through the program indicated that the vast majority of interns possessed the required skills and experiences to meet the requirement of the role; but something else was needed to help interns to do more than satisfactorily complete assigned tasks.

Academic internship programs provide an opportunity for the application of the Imagination for Justice Framework described earlier (Green, 2021). An enhanced learning experience—one that goes beyond reflection on the internship experience and helps interns impact and change the nature of the on-site experience—creates a more consistent, engaging, impactful and intimate internship experience. Through a series of well-timed and structured activities, interns can immerse themselves more deeply into their role, their relationships, and their organization, make a greater impact, and create a richer experience to reflect upon and help make more informed career decisions. In a way, it is an EL squared (EL²) approach to running an internship program—facilitating ways for interns to shape their internship experience within the experience. Looking at this from a justice context, this approach creates opportunities for all interns within a program to take actions at their internship to explore and engage in impactful ways. While there are any number of ways to do this (job crafting, assessing organizational culture, researching challenges facing the internship organization, etc.), the intern-supervisor relationship provides a great example.

The Successful Internship by Sweitzer and King (2014) highlights the critical nature of the intern-supervisor relationship and how important time is in helping the relationship develop. They also note the importance of interns being active and engaged in the relationship. Further, Rose, Teo, & Connell's *Converting Interns into Regular Employees: The Role of Intern-supervisor Exchange* (2014) shows that the quality of the intern-supervisor relationship impacts in-role performance, satisfaction, and access to intern learning opportunities.

Given the connection between the intern-supervisor relationship and intern satisfaction, performance, and learning with the experience, then helping interns develop a relationship with their supervisor provides a great opportunity to make a positive impact on the internship experience. Developing such a relationship also creates space for programmatic and teaching innovations through the Imagination for Justice Framework. One thing that I consistently hear from interns is that they would like to get to know their supervisor on both a personal and professional level. I have also learned that not every student knows how to purposefully focus time and attention on the relationship to achieve this outcome. Since internships are temporary experiences, sometimes lasting for only a few weeks, helping foster the intern-supervisor relationship is even more critical. Such a connection helps establish and fortify trust and relatability. In turn, this affords all interns in an academic internship program the ability to be more authentic and comfortable sharing their perspectives, finding and using their voice, and purposely crafting their relationship with their supervisor.

Below is an example of an exercise that can be used to jumpstart the relationship-building process between an intern and a supervisor and help interns take action to enhance their internship experience.

The Activity

As the instructor for the academic component of the internship experience, I look for ways to accelerate the relationship development process and help the intern get to know their supervisor as a person and a professional. To accomplish this, I require interns to engage in conversation with their supervisor at the beginning of the experience by working through a series of questions, some of which are pre-assigned and some of which are developed by the intern.

Pre-assigned questions: These questions are designed to help the intern better understand their role in meeting and exceeding their supervisor's expectations, the supervisor's communication preferences, what taking initiative looks like, and gain additional perspective on the organization and the field.

Intern-designed questions: These questions give the intern an opportunity to initiate the conversation and tend to help the intern better understand their supervisor, their supervisor's experiences (in the

organization and the field), and allow the intern to make a connection and enhance their comfort level with their supervisor. I share [this list](#) to provide inspiration and help the interns create their questions. In addition to the above, interns also share our program's performance evaluation that will be completed by the supervisor at the end of the experience to review key tasks and skills that must be demonstrated in order to meet performance expectations. This dialogue helps define key terms (meeting expectations, exceeding expectations, taking initiative, etc.), helps direct the efforts of the intern, and often opens the door to conversation about early-stage internship performance.

Reflection and Next Steps: After completing this relationship-building jump starter activity, interns reflect on the conversation, document key learnings, and create strategies for continuing to develop a relationship with their supervisor and perform at the highest level. This document ultimately serves as a road map for the remainder of the experience. The reflection provides a space for interns to critically examine supervisor feedback, explore intern-supervisor similarities and differences, and identify opportunities to apply all that was learned during the conversation (how to meet and/or exceed expectations, how to take initiative, how to communicate effectively with a supervisor, how to apply what was learned about a supervisor's leadership style, etc.). I also have interns share their relationship-building strategies with their peers and offer tips and suggestions based on a review of shared strategies. The creation of a justice-focused learning opportunity that includes intern-supervisor and intern-to-intern feedback opportunities connect directly to the Practice element of the Imagination for Justice Framework.

Results

Interns in our program consistently share that this is one of the most impactful activities they complete during the internship. Most commonly, intern reflections focus on how this experience helped them develop a rapport with and feel more connected to their supervisor and see their supervisor as a person. This has also helped interns feel more comfortable, less anxious and more excited about the experience. Interns have also expressed that they feel like they are on the same page with their supervisor regarding performance expectations and are able to better define what it means to [“take initiative”](#) and “go above and beyond”. Interns who reported that the conversation with the supervisor was truly a dialogue, particularly when the supervisor asked similar questions or follow-up questions, indicated feeling valued and ap-

preciated. In essence, this activity helps foster a [sense of belonging](#) by allowing interns an opportunity to become more comfortable and connected to a key member of the internship experience. One of my favorite statements from an intern was that this activity eliminated weeks of awkwardness and allowed him to be himself and make a greater impact as an intern.

A review of intern reflections in my program shows that over 90% of interns report that this activity was a valuable experience and increased their satisfaction with the internship experience. Further, 99.5 % of almost 200 interns who completed both this activity and an internship course evaluation during the past 18 months believe that they possess the confidence and skills to build an effective relationship with a future supervisor. While more assessment and research is warranted, an argument can be made that this activity helps deepen student engagement, learning and performance and democratizes an effective intern-supervisor relationship, thus applying the Imagination for Justice Framework.

Factors to Consider for Site Supervisors

While interns often express a sincere interest in getting to know their supervisor as a person and a professional, they also share that they are hesitant to devote the time needed to achieve this goal. Interns understand that supervisors have multiple responsibilities and, as a rule, they do not want to be a burden. Creating an environment and structure that dedicates time for personal connections at the beginning of the experience is helpful. Regular meetings, consistent check-ins, and working closely together on a project can build upon this recommended activity. The potential end results of this investment will be increased intern engagement, a sense of trust, confidence, willingness to authentically apply talents and skills, and performance. Additionally, I have heard firsthand how positively interns talk about supervisors and organizations that continue the work of this relationship-building activity - so this presents a great way build a reputation as a great internship site.

Factors to Consider for Interns

One of the important things I stress with interns who complete this activity is that this is a great start to the relationship-building process. The true potential and power of the activity is in its future potential. How do you continue to build the relationship? How will you apply all that you learned from the conversation during the internship? How will you authentically perform a similar exercise as you take on new roles and supervisors?

Factors to consider for Academic Internship Programs

An activity such as this requires interns to step outside of their comfort zone(s) and make a request to have a structured conversation with often busy supervisors. Providing instruction on relationship-building, building and applying cultural competencies, and communicating the expectation that supervisors will need to engage in this conversation is required. You will also need to debrief with interns who may have a negative experience or have supervisors who are unwilling to engage in the activity or provide generic emailed responses. Additionally, consider your information and data as you structure this activity. Reviewing performance review data, site visit data, your own conversations with supervisors about what makes for an exceptional intern, would be extremely valuable.

Beyond the outcomes noted, I have been able to think about the concept of justice in new ways and move from imagination for justice towards justice in practice. At the beginning of the internship, interns and supervisors are coming together in a structured, if not new way, to co-create meaning, gain new perspectives, and jointly determine the trajectory of the experience. This application, and connecting a simple activity to the Pedagogy and Practice element of the justice framework, further stimulates the imagination and makes what is visible - and what is missing - more vivid. I have an opportunity to continue to explore a topic like power dynamics in the workplace more purposefully in my program. Applying the lens of a practitioner-scholar and imagination for justice framework provides similar, deep insights and opportunities to reimagine how we design and structure inclusive and robust experiential learning opportunities.

Internship Variations to Support Equity and Access to Work-Integrated Learning

Theresa Castor

While internships hold several benefits, many students face challenges and barriers in obtaining and completing internships. For instance, ‘working students’ (i.e., students who work part-time or full-time while attending school) face the dilemma of losing personal income if they give up their jobs to complete an unpaid internship, and even when an internship is paid, those internships usually only promise short-term income, as compared to the longer-term income of a student’s current, but possibly non-career congruent job. In this respect, drawing from the Imagination for Justice framework, policies of internship programs that may have been developed to ensure consistency and quality present challenges in equity and access to internships. However, if one key objective of internships is to help students learn through a high-impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008) that is geared toward professional development, then there are several alternative experiences that students may undertake to achieve those goals (see Ducoffe, 2022). For instance, a study conducted by the Center for Research on College to Workforce Transitions (CCWT) on working students enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside found that in their regular work, students described how they developed skills in teamwork, communication, time management, and interpersonal skills, among others.

The purpose of this section is to articulate and advocate for work-integrated learning experiences for

students. In some instances, this involves developing internships in innovative and creative ways, and in other instances, this involves a work-related learning experience that may be defined distinctly from an internship, but still provide pre-professional skills and learning. In advocating for these alternatives to internships, I am not abandoning internships, but rather I am advocating for an expansion of how, as educators, we conceive of the relationship between work and learning.

In this respect, I advocate preserving lessons and best practices related to the Pedagogy, Practices, and Purposes of internship programs to re-imagine work-based learning opportunities (i.e., Programs). In doing so, I describe some work-based experiential learning opportunities that can be inclusive of students with complex time and financial considerations and constraints. In the following, I present some models of internship variations. First, I describe some ways to develop internships that take into consideration the challenges described above. Secondly, I describe some models for integrating learning and non-internship work experiences.

Developing Internships for Working Students

Internships at Current Work-Site

As noted, working students may not be able to give up their current jobs because of the needed income.

One possibility is to have students work with their current employer to turn an aspect of their work into an internship experience such that this new work would constitute a new learning experience for the student. This route likely is easier to achieve if the internship experience is a credit-bearing one where an academic supervisor could work with both student and professional site supervisor in designing the internship and in helping the student reflect intentionally on the learning experience. As an example, one of my students in communication worked with a car sales company in their customer reception area. However, she wished to have a learning experience where she could apply professional writing skills. Working with me as her academic supervisor and her professional supervisor, she created an internship in which she developed an internal company newsletter. This internship involved conducting research and interviewing, writing stories, and designing and developing the newsletter. The student did not have to give up her current job, and she was able to gain additional career congruent experience.

In order for this path to work, a student must have a professional site supervisor who is willing to support the student in allowing a shift of responsibilities as well as invest the time involved in being a co-educator for the student by helping to develop internship tasks and learning goals as well as to work with the academic internship instructor to provide feedback on the student's work.

Remote/Online Internships

A remote or online internship is one that the student completes virtually and to a certain extent, on a schedule of his or her own crafting. One advantage of this is that for students who have extensive time commitments (e.g., parents, caregivers for other family, another job position) or transportation issues (e.g., no car, limited public transportation access), an online internship can bypass many of these barriers. Also, during this current time of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote internships allow students to complete their internships in their home environment thereby decreasing their risk of exposure. However, there are disadvantages. In their study of online internships during the pandemic, Hora, Lee, Chen, and Hernandez (2021) found that online internship students reported "lower satisfaction, development value, 21st century skills, professional network development, and high-skill tasks than in-person interns" (p. 4, from Executive Summary). In addition, remote internships did not help address equity and access issues in that many of these were unpaid internships, and students

who completed remote internships tended to come from higher-income families, have higher GPAs, and be from "continuing generation" college families.

There are many ways that online internships can be improved to increase their equity and access as well as improve their learning and professional development value. Because of the potential of online internships, working with both employers and students to improve online internships may be worthwhile.

Project-based or Micro-internships

Another approach to making internships more accessible to a variety of students is through 'micro' or project-based internships. These internships are short term internships as compared to semester-based internships. Because of this, they may be easier for working students to complete. A current trend is the development of paid, remote or online internships (e.g., Parker-Dewey, see <https://www.parkerdewey.com/>). Some of the advantages of micro-internship are that they involve a smaller time commitment, may be paid, and be able to be completed online. However, such an experience makes it more difficult for students to learn and gain from other aspects of an internship such as the experience of becoming socialized into an organization, developing a professional network, or experiencing close mentoring.

On-Campus Internships

The university or college campus is already a rich resource of employment for a community, including students. For example, at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, students have completed on-campus internships related to social media, public relations, journalism, event planning, and athletics, to name some areas. On-campus internships hold many advantages--students do not have the burden of arranging transportation to an off-campus site for their education; on-campus supervisors have a first-hand understanding of the needs of students in terms of their education and scheduling constraints. On-campus internships hold many of the same benefits as on-campus employment (discussed in the next section), but could include the guidance of an academic instructor to explicitly facilitate learning as well as a direct focus on career-related experiences. As with other internships, on-campus internships will require an on-site professional supervisor who can guide the internship student in establishing tasks and responsibilities and providing feedback on the student's internship performance.

Work-Integrated Learning Experiences

On-Campus Career Congruent Employment

As a rich venue of employment, there are many career-congruent jobs for students on college campuses. For example, a student who is interested in a career in Theatre could gain valuable experience and insights through working in a campus box office; a hospitality management student could work with on-campus catering and events management; a public relations student could work with an admissions office as an on-campus tour guide; a biology student could work in an on-campus lab or garden. McClellan, Creager, and Savoca (2018) also advocate for as well as provide a blueprint for how to turn campus employment into a high-impact educational practice.

Credit-Bearing Opportunities for Job Experiences

There may be instances in which students are in part-time or even full-time jobs that are not related

to their future career aspirations *and* they are not able to pursue an internship given time and financial constraints. To better understand the circumstances of ‘working students’ and the relationship between their work and learning, in 2020, the University of Wisconsin-Parkside commissioned the CCWT to study this topic. One of their findings is that through their jobs, many students reported gaining and developing skills in areas such as critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, and more. In other words, their work was already providing a rich learning experience and environment for students. However, students were not earning academic credit for that learning.

One way to support working students in their educational attainment and to facilitate their experiential learning would be to create a credit-bearing course that is based on facilitating student learning in their current employment. Of work-based learning, Lester and Costley (2010) explain that:

Table 1: Summary of Internship-Benefits and Alternatives

	DESCRIPTION	ADVANTAGES	DRAWBACKS
Learning-based Internships	An internship completed for academic credit.	Student receives guidance and support from an academic instructor who facilitates learning and reflection, as well as guidance from a professional supervisor.	Student may not necessarily be financially compensated; student may not be able to do because of the need to work for pay.
Developing Internships at Current Work-Site	Transforming part or whole of a student’s current job into an internship	Student has relationship with workplace; student has pre-existing arrangements for time and transportation to site; student already has a paid arrangement with his/her workplace	Student’s employer would need to be willing to allow a shift in student’s work responsibility; site will need to have someone with appropriate professional expertise to supervise student
Remote/Online Internships	An internship that may be completed online and/or at the student’s residence	Transportation not required; flexible scheduling; often, paid	Student would miss the experience of developing a richer professional network and of experiencing the physical location of the internship site; student must have appropriate technology and internet connection
Micro-internships	A short-term, project-based internship, often completed online or remotely	Shorter time commitment; if completed online, transportation not required, flexible scheduling, often paid	Same disadvantages as a remote or online internship
On-Campus Internships	An internship that can be completed at a student’s educational site (i.e., his/her college or university)	Student likely will have transportation to site already arranged; supervisor likely to be sympathetic to student’s school schedule and to have an understanding for the importance of learning outcomes	Student would have some limitations in exposure to new professional context
On-Campus Career Congruent Employment	An on-campus job that is also relevant for student’s future professional aspirations	Same advantages as an on-campus internship; paid position	Intentionality required on the part of the student and supervisor to support high-impact learning
Credit-Bearing Opportunities for Job Experiences	Developing/structuring an academic course to focus on student learning at current workplace	Same advantages as internship at student’s current workplace	University would need to offer such a credit-bearing experience; student may gain limited experience that is relevant for his/her future professional interests

Much of this learning is outside the scope of what higher education institutions could reasonably be expected to engage with in that it is either at too low a level academically or it is ephemeral in nature, but there is still a substantial proportion that is concerned with higher level skills and knowledge and with the development and use of broad, high-level capability that suggests that it has capacity to be recognized and enhanced through university involvement. (p. 562)

Work experiences already provide a rich resource for learning. Developing credit-bearing opportunities that connect to those experiences provide multiple benefits in terms of student learning, helping with degree attainment, and addressing equity and access to a college education (also see Ducoffe, 2022).

Summary

There are many work-integrated experiences that provide pre-professional skills and learning for students beyond internships. Table 1 provides a summary that highlights key benefits of internships as well as alternatives to traditional internships described in this section. In presenting this table, our intention is to frame internships and work-based learning with an eye toward justice, by envisioning how these can each benefit students, creating equity and access to learning for different types of students.

The preceding sections focused on different aspects and approaches to re-imagining internships with a justice framework. In the following section, we provide a preview of the additional scholarly articles in this special issue that show how an imagination for justice can be adopted in experiential education.

Envisioning Justice: Shaping the Future of Experiential Education

In light of these articulated priorities and practices from the NSEE Fellows, an increased emphasis on quality student learning experiences, access, equity, and increased opportunities for experiential learning were definitive characteristics of their justice-orientation lens. When applying the Imagination for Justice Framework, the fellows addressed the intersection of pedagogy, program, practice, purpose, and policy within experiential education. Their explorations and inquiry led to areas of experiential education that addressed multiple, intersectional areas of the framework.

The approaches they developed encourage educators to address their own imagination for justice by applying a justice lens at the intersections of their professional practice. The scholars in this special issue of *Experiential Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ELTHE)* responded to the call for proposals that addressed the theme, “Exploring the Relationship between Experiential Learning and Social, Economic, Racial, and Environmental Justice.” Each of these scholar-authors adopted a justice-orientation lens, and each article contributes to experiential teaching and learning by addressing multiple intersections within the Imagination for Justice Framework.

For example, Williams situates global community-engaged learning at the intersection of pedagogy and practice in “On the Borders: A Multi-Axial Approach to Community-based Global Learning.” Lin et al. also contributes to the discussion on the intersection of practice and pedagogy in “Recovery as

a Gift of Blackness: Epistemic Justice in Community Engagement and Learning.” This article focuses on a community-based cultural practice as a path for student/intern engagement and learning with a community organization and draws from community-based practices and cultural practices as a source of knowledge for experiential teaching and learning. Ross et al. positions collaborative research and community-engaged pedagogy with their practice in which community partners are co-educators in “Radical Listening, Action, and Reflection at the Boundaries of Youth Violence Prevention.” Munter extends the dialogue on pedagogy and practice by exploring a program in the context of a farmworker community in “Justice-oriented Learning: Reconfiguring Experiential Education with a California Farmworker Community.”

Other practitioner-scholars explored the intersection of practice, programs, and purpose within the Imagination for Justice Framework. Arthur and Guy interrogate the experience of women in co-ops in an engineering program in “Difficult, but worth it: Exploring the Experiences of Women in Engineering during Co-op.” Parello and Valentine discuss field trips and their impact on learning in “Exploring the Educational Impact of Academic Field Trips over Time.” Sinutko, Wodwaski, and Adams explore developing specific competencies in a nursing program in “Exploring Compassion for the Community and Diversity through Nursing Experiential Learning.” Vogelgesang addresses equity of learning outcomes in the context of community colleges in “A Quantitative

Analysis of High Impact Practices and Civic Learning Outcomes among Community College Students.”

As some scholars explored programs and their purpose in the context of experiential learning, they also intersected with policy development of experiential education. For example, Armijo et al. interrogate how the preparation for Latinx students and career readiness programs set Latinx students up for success in “*Latinx Internship Prepa*: An Experiential Career Readiness and Preparation Program for Latinx, First-generation Undergraduate College Students.” Parry discusses colonial language and the importance of framing language in her article “Unlearning Colonial Course Descriptions to Transform Learning Culture.” Wittman explores diversity and equity through institutional funding as part of co-curricular experiential learning programs in “Funding the Future We Want: Leveraging University Funding to Support Black and Indigenous Communities.”

In effect, as both the scholars in this issue and the NSEE Fellows have explicitly articulated, it is essential to acknowledge our role as educators of experiential learning and the intersections with our role as advocates for student learning and success. We invite an increased dialogue in the experiential education field of our role as tempered radicals and change agents of higher education. The future of our work in experiential education depends on our ability to advocate for the change we want to see happen. In the context of this special issue, focused on the relationship between experiential learning and social, economic, environmental, and racial justice, our role as educators in this field will require us to serve as advocates and change agents at the intersections within our work (i.e., the Imagination for Justice Framework). The articles in this issue demonstrate a variety of scholars who explore the intersections through research and community-based methodologies. The call is clear: as experiential learning and teaching educators, we need to understand how our work has the potential to create change in pedagogy, practice, programs, purposes, and policies at our institutions. Such changes will lead to increased opportunities and quality experiences for all students. Through this justice orientation, experiential teaching and learning has the potential to foster the development of a new framework in which our students and community partners are at the center of this intersection. ■

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