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RESEARCH BRIEF

Structures of Meaning in Experiential Learning:

A Content Analysis of Internship Portfolios

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Abstract: An internship semester in Washington, D.C. can be very consequential for the academic, professional, and personal growth of a student. The study is a content analysis of 170 internship portfolios of Stockton College students from Fall 2006 to Spring 2011. As students commence their internship semester a vast majority are quite settled about their academic and professional goals. An equally significant number also harbor profound uncertainty about their goals for personal growth and development. Self-evaluations in the internship portfolios indicate that the experiential learning context of an internship enables many interns to ameliorate the uncertainty about their academic, professional, and personal goals. Other interns re-assess and revise their short- and long-term objectives, thereby injecting uncertainty into previously settled goals. Both levels of discernment are activated by the vast opportunities for mentorship, supervision, and para-professional experience that an internship semester offers. Insights gleaned from student (portfolio) narratives can be an invaluable contribution to developing hypotheses for more systematic study of the meaning of internships for students. Additionally, the study's conclusions point to helpful recommendations for improving student advising before and during an internship semester in the nation's capital.

Introduction

The Washington Internship Program (WIP) is an important manifestation of Richard Stockton College's long-standing commitment to experiential learning. Since 1974 more than 1,100 Stockton students have ventured to the nation's capital to undertake a semester of academic, para-professional, and personal enrichment. Anecdotal testimonials from many intern alumni suggest that the inflection point of their career paths was their participation in the WIP. Former interns also identify the extraordinary opportunity for personal growth as the single most unanticipated benefit of an internship. Experiential learning can therefore be far more consequential than is otherwise assumed from a careerist orientation that privileges the obvious resume-enhancing benefits of an internship placement.

The study analyzes how interns represent (or self-evaluate) their own experiential learning through a content analysis of their internship portfolios. The study's conceptual frame is that students construct structures of meaning through which academic, professional, and personal goals are articulated and evaluated. A corollary presumption is that prospective interns ascribe high degrees of salience to their nascent goals because their pursuit will necessarily entail significant opportunity costs. Content analyses of internship portfolios suggest that the character of that salience is differentiated among the three types of goals, i.e., academic, professional, and personal. Some students begin their internship with certainty about their goals; what remains to be determined is precisely how much the internship will enhance their achievement. Other students harbor uncertainty about the specificity of their goals and utilize the internship to clarify their articulation. The experiential learning context of an internship therefore presents a unique

opportunity for these students to discern their career and personal goals. Both types of students attach salience to their goals but proceed along distinct pathways as they achieve them.

The study maps a particular cohort[1] of Stockton College interns along these two pathways: 1) **Salience/Certainty-Enhancement** or 2) **Salience/Uncertainty-Discernment**. These distinct pathways constitute structures of meaning that interns utilize to formulate and evaluate their academic, professional, and personal goals. Qualitative analyses of internship portfolios demonstrate that interns strategically deploy an ad hoc approach in activating these pathways, alternating between the two pathways as the semester proceeds. The relative levels of certainty and uncertainty that students harbor as the internship commences may fluctuate as unanticipated academic or career possibilities emerge. Interns may also proceed along one pathway for one type of goal and a different trajectory for another. The study's content analyses reveal how interns navigate these pathways as they articulate, achieve, and evaluate their internship goals. A series of hypotheses are formulated for further testing with randomized samples of interns regarding how these pathways shape student perceptions of their internship experiences. Recommendations are also proposed to strengthen the resource networks that enhance the internship experience. This study represents the first installment of a larger, two-part evaluation of Stockton College's WIP. A subsequent study will analyze the longer-term impact of an internship on the careers of internship alumni.

Internship Portfolios

Conventional wisdom suggests that students pursue internship experiences to develop para-professional skills, establish networks of contacts, increase employment marketability, and

[1] The cohort consists of Stockton students who completed internships in Washington, D.C. in semesters ranging from spring 2006 to fall 2011.

enhance graduate and professional school applications. This careerist understanding of internships presumes that students have largely settled many of the larger questions regarding their academic, professional, and personal goals. The uncritically accepted presumption is that interns pursue these goals with undaunted clarity and certainty. A corollary view is that internship portfolios are constituted by documentary evidence of how internships facilitate the attainment of these pre-established goals. The study challenges the notion that portfolios are merely print, or electronic, depositories of materials that chart a linear narrative from point A to point B; i.e., from the articulation of goals to the evaluation of their achievement. The utility of internship portfolios is not merely that they demonstrate proficiency in satisfying an internship program's requirements for purposes of assessment and grading. They are also venues for engaging the broader (existential) project of self-representation, exploration, and discernment.

The construction of an internship portfolio is a deeply reflective exercise in self-representation (Yancey, 2004, p. 749). The incorporation of internship goals into a portfolio entails more than their mere articulation. Students are necessarily drawn into an intimate realm of existential discernment and self-discovery that is not simply reducible to satisfying proficiency standards. The articulation, pursuit, and evaluation of internship goals are constitutive elements of a student's identify formation. Internship portfolios chronicle how interns explore the unfolding possibilities of who they are and who they are becoming (Tierney, et. al., 1998, p.478). The value of internship portfolios therefore greatly exceeds their utility in assessing curricular outcomes by serving the dual purpose of both program assessment and self-evaluation (Carlson & Yungblut, 1998, p.48). The former is conducted by internship program advisers and faculty, whereas the latter is a student-directed process of managing uncertainty through discernment.

Scope of Study

The internship portfolios that comprise the analytic material for the present study include the following items: 1) a Learning Objectives Statement (LOS) or an Individual Development Plan (IDP); 2) a Final Defense Letter (FDL); 3) a work sample from a student's internship placement site; 4) reaction papers of program activities; 5) a resume; 6) an informational interview; 7) a civic engagement project; 8) a course syllabus for the internship seminar; and 9) mid-term and final evaluations of the interns by program advisors and faculty. Items 3 to 9 are used to assess program outcomes through summative evaluation; whereas items 1 and 2 (the LOS/IDP, and FDL) represent formative evaluations of how interns pursue their academic, professional and personal goals.

Summative evaluation typically occurs at the end of a learning experience and focuses on the achievement of curricular outcomes; in contrast, formative evaluation occurs while an experience is in progress; i.e., as internship goals are being articulated and realized.[2] Herein lies the dual character of internship portfolios; they satisfy the ever-increasing imperative for accountability (Dougan, 1996, p. 171) while enabling students to engage in identify formation through the articulation and (self) evaluation of their career and personal goals. The multi-dimensional character of internship portfolios does not imply a zero-sum relationship exists between the two types of evaluation. Some educators have a misplaced concern that employing portfolios for one mode of assessment (summative evaluation) will necessarily weaken its utility for the type of self-reflections associated with formative evaluation (Dudley, 2001, p.20).

[2] Types of Evaluation in Instructional Design; (http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/isd/types_of_evaluations.html); accessed July 24, 2012.

Internship portfolios can serve multiple purposes as long as they are structured to elicit the kinds of narratives that are appropriate for each mode of evaluation.

The study begins with a demographic profile of the Stockton College intern cohort that is the subject of the analysis. It then proceeds to an extended content analysis and discussion of the qualitative data drawn from student narratives in the Learning Objectives Statement (LOS), the Individual Development Plan (IDP), and the Final Defense Letter (FDL). Hypotheses on the role structures of meaning play in the achievement of career and personal goals are developed in the concluding section of the content analysis. A series of recommendations are also proposed to strengthen Stockton's WIP, as well as internship programs at other institutions of higher learning.

Profile of Stockton Interns

The portfolio study covers the calendar years 2006-2011 (spring, summer, and fall semesters) and analyzes the experiential learning outcomes of 170 Stockton students who completed internships in Washington, D.C. (see Table 1). If the number of expected internships for the remainder of 2012 is included, as well as post-graduate internships, internships abroad, independent internships, and interns for whom a portfolio is either incomplete or not available, the total number of Stockton interns since spring 2006 rises to 223. The portfolio study does not include 2012 because the spring, summer, and fall 2012 portfolios are not digitalized.

Table 1: Stockton Interns by Year (2006-2011)

Year	Interns	
2006	15	
2007	24	
2008	27	
2009	36	
2010	37	
2011	31	
2012	39	Based on Current Acceptances
	8	Post-Graduate Interns and Independent internships
	6	Incomplete or Not Available Portfolios
Total	223	

Gender Distribution

The gender distribution among Stockton undergraduates is not reflected in the study. While females outnumber males in the College's undergraduate population (58% and 42%, respectively), Table 2 indicates women are a slight minority in the study.

Table 2: Stockton Interns by Gender (2006-2011)

Gender	# of Interns	% of Total
Men	88	51.8
Women	82	48.2
Total	170	100.0

Academic Distribution

A lingering misconception is that internships are designed specifically for students in the social sciences, and Political Science more specifically. In fact, internships are available across

all academic disciplines. Although Stockton interns in the portfolio study have majors in five of the College's eight schools, a vast majority are indeed clustered in the social sciences. Table 3 indicates that almost two-thirds of the 170 interns in the portfolio study are from the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences (SOBL). Two programs within the school constitute almost 80% of all SOBL interns between 2006 and 2011: Political Science (51) and Criminal Justice (39).

Table 3: Stockton Interns by Academic Division (2006-2011)[3]

School	Interns	% of Total
SOBL	111	65.3
ARHU	26	15.3
NAMS	16	9.4
BUSN	14	8.2
SHS	3	1.8
Total	170	100

Geographic Distribution:

The geographic distribution of Stockton interns covers most of New Jersey. As Table 4 indicates, the interns in the study represent 19 of New Jersey's 21 counties (three interns are out-of-state students). A clustering effect is also evident within the intern cohort; slightly more than two-thirds of the 170 interns are from the five counties of Atlantic, Ocean, Monmouth, Camden, and Burlington.

[3] School of Social and Behavioral Sciences (SOBL): Arts and Humanities (ARHU); Natural and Mathematical Sciences (NAMS); School of Business (BUSN); School of Health Sciences (SHS).

Table 4: Stockton Students by New Jersey County

County	Interns	% of Total
Atlantic	46	27.1
Ocean	28	16.5
Monmouth	17	10.0
Camden	14	8.2
Burlington	10	5.9
Cape May	7	4.1
Essex	7	4.1
Gloucester	7	4.1
Cumberland	6	3.5
Bergen	5	2.9
Mercer	3	1.8
Out-of-State	3	1.8
Passaic	3	1.8
Union	3	1.8
Hunterdon	2	1.2
Middlesex	2	1.2
Morris	2	1.2
Somerset	2	1.2
Sussex	2	1.2
Hudson	1	0.6
Total	170	100.0

Placement Distribution

Stockton interns undertake internships across a wide range of placements (i.e., federal, state, and local government; the non-profit sector; advocacy organizations; private firms; law enforcement; national and local media outlets; and medical and research institutions). Table 5 indicates that two categories account for slightly more than half of the 170 internships between 2006 and 2011 (federal agencies [29.4%] and advocacy organizations [22.9%]). The following

categories comprised slightly more than one-third of all internship placements held by Stockton students: local governmental agencies (9.4%), public relations firms (7.1%), hospitals (6.5%)), law offices (5.3%), Congress (4.1%), and media outlets (4.1%).

Table 5: Stockton Interns by Internship Placement (2006-2011)

Category	# of Interns	% of Total
Federal Agency	50	29.4
Advocacy	39	22.9
Local Government	16	9.4
Public Relations Firm	12	7.1
Hospitals	11	6.5
Law Offices	9	5.3
Congressional Office	7	4.1
Media Outlet	7	4.1
Government Contractor	5	2.9
Private Firms	4	2.4
Cultural Arts	4	2.4
State Government	3	1.8
Research Organization	2	1.2
Diplomacy	1	0.6
Total	170	100.0

Seminar Distribution:

Stockton interns receive 12 academic credits for their semester of experiential learning in Washington, D.C. Eight credits (WASH 3940) apply to the internship placement and four to an academic seminar (WASH 3620); students select from approximately 40 courses offered by the Washington Center (TWC) each fall, spring, and summer session. Table 6 categorizes the seminars by content area and reflects a broad range of interests among the Stockton intern

cohort. This is partially attributable to the latitude students can exercise in course selection, which is not predicated by their academic major or even their internship placement.

Table 6: Stockton Interns by Seminar Content (2006-2011)

DC Seminar Content Area	# of Interns	% of Total
National Security & Foreign Policy	34	20.0
Legal Studies	23	13.5
Business	18	10.6
Media Studies	19	11.2
Cultural Studies	18	10.6
Forensic Psychology	16	9.4
Social Issues	11	6.5
Leadership Studies	10	5.9
Science	10	5.9
Campaigns	4	2.4
US Public Policy	5	2.9
Congressional Studies	2	1.2
Total:	170	100.0

Methodology

The analytic material for the study is drawn from two key documents in the internship portfolios which students compile throughout their semester in Washington, D.C. The first is typically written during the first two weeks of an internship semester and is referred to as either the Learning Objectives Statement (LOS) or the Individual Development Plan (IDP). TWC transitioned from the LOS to the IDP in spring 2010. The former is somewhat narrow in scope; it directed students to briefly describe the responsibilities at their internship placement and, more importantly for purposes of the study, outline their (academic, professional, civic engagement,

and personal) goals and objectives.[4] The IDP retains the basic structure of the LOS but also asks students to reflect on their future aspirations; to identify their strengths and weaknesses; to describe their conceptions of leadership; and to discuss individuals who have inspired them. Although the IDP is more expansive in scope than the LOS, the study approaches both items from the same analytic frame; i.e., to analyze structures of meaning in how students represent themselves through their internship portfolios. There are significantly more LOS documents in the portfolio study than IDPs; 101 and 69, respectively.

The same analytic frame is applied to the second document; i.e., the Final Defense Letter (FDL). It is written in the last two weeks of the internship semester and consists of a self-evaluation of how well students attained the goals and objectives outlined in the LOS/IDPs. A preliminary methodological concern regarding the scope of the study is that both the LOS/IDPs and the FDLs are written while the internship is ongoing. This fact begs the question of what ought to constitute the proper frame of reference for articulating a student's goals and objectives. Should it be the generalized aspirations students formulate independent of, or unencumbered by, the particularity of a specific experiential learning context (an aspirational orientation)? Or, should the proper frame be the actual responsibilities students perform during their internship placements (a careerist orientation)? These students do not view the internship experience as a venue for personal growth and discernment, but as an indispensable rung in the career ladder. Another plausible frame is an organicist orientation that views the articulation of goals and objectives as an organic, ongoing and never quite complete process of refining aspirational impulses in an iterative dynamic within particular experiential learning contexts.

[4] The present study does not analyze civic engagement goals; that is the focus of a subsequent study on the role civic engagement plays in experiential learning contexts.

Students are generally predisposed toward either the careerist or the organicist orientations because they undertake the assignment of writing their LOS/IDPs just as they are becoming fully immersed in their internships. This forecloses the possibility that interns will de-couple the articulation of LOS/IDP goals from the immediacy of their own internship placement. Moreover, TWC's assignment guidelines also direct students to formulate their goals/objectives in light of their specific internship responsibilities, which favor a more careerist orientation. Nonetheless, and to varying degrees of specificity, many students incorporate aspirational elements into their (academic, professional, personal, and civic engagement) goals and objectives, which is more consistent with an organicist orientation. The exercise of constructing LOS/IDPs therefore effectively precludes aspirational narratives while privileging careerist or organicist orientations. A majority (58%) of the study's internship cohort reflects a primarily organicist orientation in the narrative structure of their LOS/IDPs, while the careerist frame of reference characterizes 42% of Stockton internship portfolios.

Several student interns noted in their portfolios that the exercise of explicitly formulating goals and objectives was quite valuable. Indeed, the LOS/IDPs represented the first time many students clarified what had previously been little more than vague and inchoate expressions of longer-term goals/objectives. Moreover, the LOS/IDPs served as guideposts that enabled many interns to remain focused and disciplined throughout their internship experience, and provided a self-referential benchmark for critically evaluating their own progress through the FDL. The internship portfolio provides a structured platform to engage in, what is for many students, an unprecedented level of self-reflection and self-representation.

That exercise occurs after the internship begins and before it ends. The articulation/evaluation of goals and objectives is therefore not predicated on a temporal and critical detachment from the

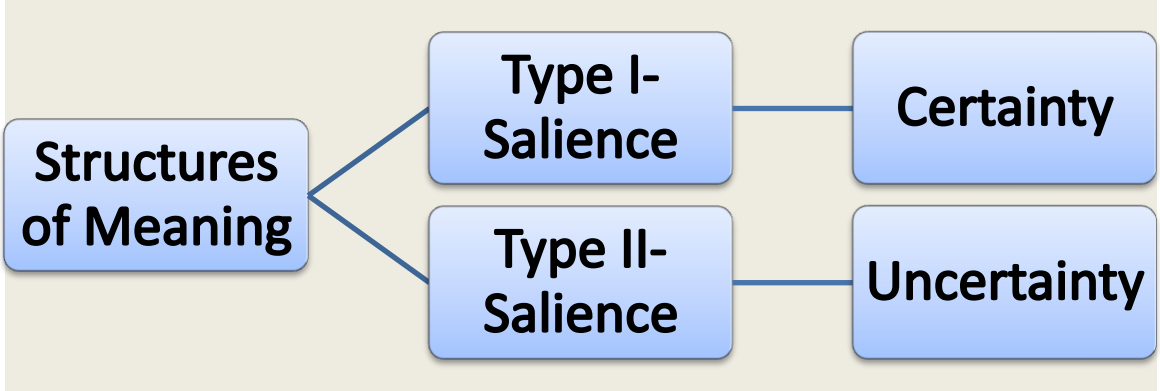
emotional and psychological immediacy of the experiential learning context. This methodological concern does not diminish the insights that can be gleaned from a content analysis of how interns specify and reflect upon their own (academic, professional, civic engagement, and personal) goals and objectives.

An underlying assumption of the study is that most, if not all, students harbor elements of all three orientations (i.e., aspirational, careerist, and organicist). However, the internship portfolio is compiled in a fashion that gives expression to only two of the three orientations. A more comprehensive process of articulation/evaluation should ideally contain four stages (this is developed in the section Conclusion and Recommendations) to give expression to all three orientations. The first and fourth stages of that proposed framework are currently not elements of the internship portfolio; the second and third stages are the LOS/IDPs and the FDLs.

Prospective interns can be placed along a continuum of uncertainty regarding their (academic, professional, and personal) goals and objectives. A commonality among interns on this Uncertainty Continuum is the high degree of salience they attach to their goals and objectives. Indeed, they would not incur an internship's high opportunity costs if their goals lacked salience. While the salience of internship goals is largely settled as students begin their internship semesters, the uncertainty that attaches to them can be highly variegated both inter- and intra-personally. Uncertainty can also vary significantly across different types of goals; i.e., academic, professional, and personal. The manner in which students activate the processes of goal articulation, achievement, and evaluation reveals the structures of meaning students employ to interpret their particular internship experiences. These structures mark the venues for generating self-representations through the material students incorporate in their internship portfolios.

The study postulates two basic types of structures of meaning which provide the analytic framework for interpreting the qualitative data in the internship portfolios, particularly the LOS/IDPs and the FDLs.

Diagram 1: Structures of Meaning



As Diagram 1 indicates, the structures of meaning for interns can proceed along two developmental pathways. Along the first (Type I-Salience/Certainty), students attach a high degree of salience to their (academic, professional, and personal) goals and undertake their internships with a high level of certainty; i.e., the specificity of their goals is settled and the essential purpose of the internship is to significantly enhance their achievement. In the second pathway (Type II-Salience/Uncertainty) the specification of goals/objectives is primarily characterized by flux, or uncertainty, and the experiential learning context of an internship is activated by interns to engage in discernment about their goals/objectives.

The content analysis of portfolio LOS/IDPs and FDLs maps the study's intern cohort along these two pathways. The study draws insights about the impact of internships on the developmental trajectories of students in terms of their academic, professional, and personal goals. The present study should therefore be of particular interest to college administrators and

faculty who advise or supervise students throughout the internship semester, students and parents who are deliberating the relative benefits/costs of an internship, curriculum specialists with a pedagogical interest in the study's recommendations, and college administrators who assess the educational outcomes of experiential learning.

The content analysis presented herein is an intensive case study of an intern cohort from Richard Stockton College of New Jersey; the study analyzes 170 internship portfolios written between spring 2006 and fall 2011. A limitation of the study is that the findings are not appropriate for broad generalization because the sample of internship portfolios is not randomized. Moreover, the vast diversity in educational institutions and the manner in which they structure their internship programs would caution against efforts to formulate a general theory about how students interpret their internship experiences. The more modest scope of the case study is to the treat the content analysis of the 170 internship portfolios as an exploratory inquiry, in order to formulate hypotheses that can be further tested with randomized samples of internship portfolios. Thus, the contribution to the internship literature the study offers is the formulation of testable hypotheses regarding how students negotiate structures of meaning during their internship experiences.

The basis for hypothesis-formulation in the present study is a content analysis of four themes in the student narratives that comprise the LOS/IDPs and FDLs. The central concept of each theme is analyzed by analyzing how a corresponding question is addressed collectively by the intern cohort. The themes, concepts, and questions are outlined below:

1) **Theme One (Uncertainty)**: *Do students harbor uncertainty about their academic, professional, and personal trajectories?*

2) **Theme Two (Decision Points):** *Do students utilize internships to arrive at decision points regarding their trajectories?*

3) **Theme Three (Critical Junctures):** *Do internships represent a critical juncture (or inflection point) in their trajectories?*

4) **Theme Four (Integration):** *Do internships provide a proper experiential learning context in which students seek integration between their academic training and their para-professional experience in the internship?*

The content analysis of the LOS/IDPs and the FDLs codes textual references to these four themes in order to interpret them through descriptive statistics.

The master narrative in the internship literature posits that Type I-Salience/Certainty predominates in regard to career goals (academic and professional), and largely attributes nominal significance to what is herein termed Type II-Salience/Uncertainty, especially in terms of the articulation and achievement of personal goals. Additionally, there is an uncritically held assumption in the scholarship that career goals are invariably superior to personal goals in the construction of student self-representations in the internship portfolios. The present study challenges those assumptions by devoting particular analytic attention to Type II-Salience/Uncertainty in the LOS/IDPs and the FDLs.

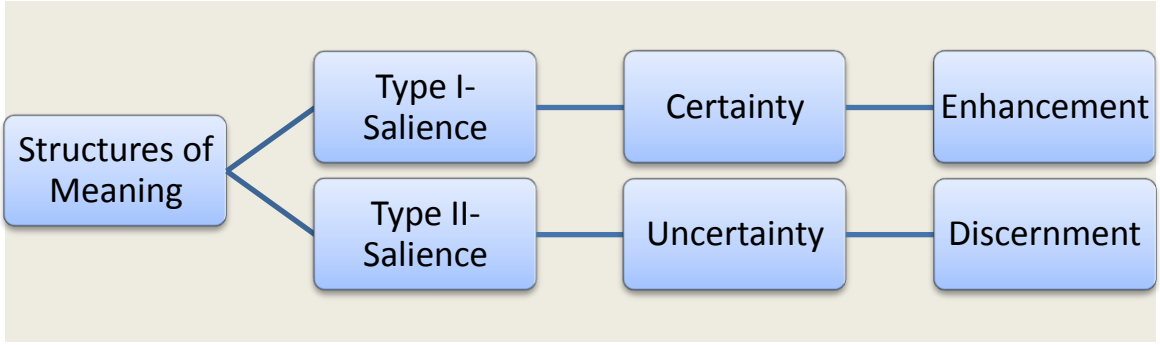
Data Analysis and Discussion

Theme One (Uncertainty)

The portfolio narratives concerning academic, professional, and personal goals in the LOS/IDPs and FDLs are coded for the presence or absence of Type I & II-Salience. The coded data also reflect whether Type II-Salience/Uncertainty remained constant, increased, or decreased from the LOS/IDPs to the FDLs. Markers of Type II-Salience/Uncertainty are textual references to issues that represent areas of unsettledness in the articulation of career and personal goals in the LOS/IDPs. Type II-Salience/Uncertainty in the FDLs is reflected in textual

references to the ***discernment*** that interns undergo during the course of the internship semester. In contrast, interns who proceed along the Type I-Salience/Certainty pathway refer to how the internship experience is an ***enhancement*** of their largely settled career and personal goals. These additional criteria are reflected in the revised diagram below.

Diagram 2: Structures of Meaning (2)



The study's qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed for the intern cohort as a group. The objective is to situate the entire cohort along a scale from Low to Very High Type I & II-Salience for academic, professional, and personal goals in both the LOS/IDPs and the FDLs. The scale represents the breadth of salience for each type of goal for the intern cohort as a group, not the relative degree of emotional or psychological intensity students attach to each type of goal. Thus, the following scale represents the breadth, not the depth, of salience.

Table 7: Salience Scale

Type I & II Salience	Range
Low	1% - 24.9%
Moderate	25% - 49.9%
High	50% - 74.9%
Very High	75% - 100%

The LOS/IDP data indicate that academic goals are largely settled or un-problematic (Very High Type I-Salience/Certainty) for the vast majority of the intern cohort. Conversely, the intern cohort evinces Low Type II-Salience/Uncertainty for academic goals. Additionally, about one-fourth of the intern cohort reflects Low to Moderate Type II-Salience/Uncertainty for their professional goals, and most interns attach Very High Type II-Salience/Uncertainty to their personal goals.

In terms of academic goals/objectives, only 18 of the 170 interns (10.6%) described their academic goals in terms that conveyed Type II-Salience/Uncertainty. Their comments are generally framed in terms of uncertainty about the academic majors they are currently pursuing; i.e., whether the internship advances their educational trajectories, or whether they will pursue post-graduate study. By the end of the internship semesters, when students typically write the FDLs, only four additional students (for a total of 22, or 12.6% of the total) attached Type II-Salience/Uncertainty to their educational pathways. Thus, academic goals are overwhelming salient for the intern cohort, and that salience is couched in a high degree of certitude. These internship goals are generally settled in the minds of students and the instrumental value of the

internship is largely understood as a means of significantly enhancing the achievement of those goals (hence, the Type I-Salience/Certainty-Enhancement pathway).

Some students begin their internship semester with uncertainty about their academic goals and seek to ameliorate it within the experiential learning context of their internship program. Two-thirds of the interns in the Type II-Salience/Uncertainty pathway who noted a degree of academic uncertainty in their LOS/IDP did so as well in the FDL. Conversely, this means that one-third of the (Type II-Salience/Uncertainty) interns largely resolved their unsettledness by the time they wrote the FDL. However, 45% of students who expressed uncertainty about their academic goals in the FDL did not do so in the LOS/IDPs. This suggests that the nature of the experiential learning context can itself contribute to an increase in Type II-Salience/Uncertainty. An internship semester expands the range of options students are afforded in Washington, D.C; it enables them to create and utilize new networks of contacts; and it allows interns to benefit from the extensive guidance and mentoring offered by internship supervisors, program advisors, and professional colleagues at their placement sites. These new sources of (goal-related) information can facilitate a reassessment of previously settled goals, on the one hand, or ameliorate the uncertainty that previously attached to their goals, on the other. Internship advisers and supervisors should therefore recognize that while some students commence their Washington semester with (goal) uncertainty, other students develop it as their internship progresses.

In terms of professional goals, Type II-Salience/Uncertainty is evident in the narratives of 40 LOS/IDPs, or 23.5% of the 170 portfolios (Low Type II-Salience/Uncertainty); and increased slightly to 28.2% (Moderate Type II-Salience) in the FDLs. The uncertainty regarding professional goals expressed in the LOS/IDPs was largely ameliorated for almost one-third of the

interns who initially ascribed uncertainty to this category of goals/objectives. However, 42% of the students for whom professional goals were salient in the FDL did not express uncertainty about their professional goals in the LOS/IDPs. As noted earlier, the nature of the internship experience engenders a degree of uncertainty among some students who otherwise begin their internships with Type I-Salience/Certainty; they essentially re-evaluate previously settled goals and objectives in light of new information and possibilities. A virtue of the internship experience is that it implicitly challenges many students to continually refine the articulation of their goals.

Academic and professional goals/objectives can be grouped under the general rubric of career aspirations. Content analysis of the internship portfolios clearly indicates that the vast majority of the intern cohort does not ascribe Type II-Salience/Uncertainty to career goals/objectives. Students who self-select to pursue a semester-long internship in Washington, D.C. generally have a high degree of certainty about the career aspirations they identify in the internship portfolios (i.e., Type I-Salience/Certainty). These students largely view the experiential learning context of their internship as a unique opportunity to advance those goals/objectives; i.e., the careerist orientation noted earlier. However, for a minority of students career goals/objectives are uncertain and in flux (i.e., Type II-Salience/Uncertainty), and the objects of considerable deliberation and discernment throughout the course of the internship semester. Faculty and internship advisors should be especially attentive to the not insignificant portion of any intern cohort that is continually revising and re-evaluating its career goals and objectives throughout their internship semester.

The portfolio narratives on career aspirations (i.e., academic and professional goals) can be viewed as distinct data points in the LOS/IPDs and the FDLs and aggregated for purposes of analysis. This yields 680 distinct narrative entries on academic/professional goals among the

study's 170 internship portfolios, when the LOS/IDPs and FDLs are combined. Among these, 128 entries express some variation of Type II-Salience/Uncertainty, which means that approximately one-in-five reflections on career goals contain a degree of uncertainty. About 63% of this group expressed uncertainty about career goals in both the LOS/IDPs and the FDL, and 37% noted Type II-Salience/Uncertainty in only one or the other document: 14% of interns that expressed (career) uncertainty in the LOS/IDPs did not do so in the FDLs, and 23% that described uncertainty in the FDLs were not similarly concerned in LOS/IDPs. Overall, a higher proportion of students pivoted from Type I- to Type II-Salience in the course of the internship experience than the converse. These data further reinforce the notion that internship advisers/supervisors should be especially cognizant of the discernment and self-discovery that occur within the experiential learning context of an internship.

The implication of these data is that the discernment of career goals proceeds along three levels. The first represents the more common pattern for interns who express Type II-Salience/Uncertainty (63%), namely that the process of discerning career goals is an ongoing process of self-evaluation throughout the internship semester, as evidenced by their narrative entries in both the LOS/IDPs and their FDLs. The second level pertains to almost one-fourth of the students who expressed Type II-Salience/Uncertainty (23%). Their narratives contain elements of uncertainty about career goals in their FDLs, but not in the LOS/IDPs. These students begin their internship with a relatively settled set of career goals. However, the para-professional training at their internships, the mentoring relationships they establish, and the networks of contacts they build present career and educational options which were unanticipated, unknown, or even previously rejected. The uncertainly that arises for these students in the course of their internship experience is largely framed in positive terms; i.e., they are presented with

potential opportunities that would not have been available had they not undertaken an internship. This applies as well to students in the first level, but they began their internships with Type II-Salience/Uncertainty; whereas the students at the second level acquired it in the course of their internship.

The third level is comprised by the least common trend among the 128 students who expressed Type II- Salience/Uncertainty (14%). These students began their internships with uncertainty in their career goals, as reflected in their LOS/IDPs, but largely resolved it by the time of their FDLs. Like other interns, they too were presented with a broader range of career options that enabled them to ameliorate if not entirely resolve their previous level of uncertainty, thereby pivoting from Type II- to Type I-Salience.

While the study places the academic and professional goals described in the LOS/IDPs and FDLs within the broader category of career goals, it treats the personal goals outlined in the internship portfolios as a distinct though related category, and interprets the data in a more nuanced manner. According to the Type I & II-Salience Scale, the intern cohort in the present study can be properly categorized as expressing Very High Type II-Salience/Uncertainty for personal goals because 145 internship portfolios (or 85.3%) contain textual references in the LOS/IDPs that evoke elements of uncertainty, or unsettledness, about personal goals. A virtually identical number of FDLs also reflected Type II-Salience/Uncertainty (144, or 84.7%). The narratives in the internship portfolios that pertain to personal goals are quite expansive and aspirational in character. The areas of personal growth many students feel an urgency to improve include organizational skills, living a healthier lifestyle, better communication skills, becoming more cosmopolitan, projecting a more professional demeanor, and exuding more self-confidence and assertiveness. What is less clear is the source of that urgency. Students may arrive in

Washington, D.C. with an acute sense that certain dimensions of their personal lives must be improved for them to be successful in their internships. That urgency may also be activated once the internships are well underway and they become keenly aware of their personal inadequacies by comparing themselves to fellow interns, professionals at their placement sites, and the generally high-powered culture of the nation's capital.

The interpretive analyses for this stage of the portfolio study proceeded along two tracks. The first entailed reviewing the LOS/IDP narratives holistically and thematically to identify the most common personal goals as the internship semester commenced. The personal growth issues were organized by category as indicated by Table 8.

Table 8: Personal Goals by Category

Variable Name:	Variable Description:
Organizational Skills	Time-Management; Budgeting, Study Habits
Healthy Lifestyle	Exercise; Diet & Weight Loss, Proper Sleep
Emotional Development	Confidence; Self-Esteem; Maturity; Extroverted; Assertiveness
Comm. Skills	Public Speaking, Writing, Conversational Skills
Cosmopolitanism	Open-Mindedness, Diversity & Multiculturalism; Expanding Horizons
Independence	Managing Life Without Parental Supervision
Comfort Zone	Stepping Outside of Comfort Zone
Second Language	Learning New Language or Improving Proficiency in a Second Language
Better Informed	Reading Newspapers; Intellectual Curiosity
Professional Development	Professionalism
Other	Additional Modes of Personal Growth

The narratives were then re-read and all textual references to those categories were coded to construct a frequency table (see Table 9). Most students made multiple references to the categories in Table 9; so the frequencies represent the number of textual references, not the number of internship portfolios within each category.

Table 9: Textual References by Category of Personal Goals

Variable Name:	LOS/IDPs	% of Total	FDLs	% of Total
Organizational Skills	68	46.7%	24	16.7%
Healthy Lifestyle	38	26.2%	7	4.9%
Emotional Development	75	51.7%	88	61.1%
Communication Skills	37	26.0%	14	9.7%
Cosmopolitanism	32	22.1%	17	11.8%
Independence	26	17.9%	20	13.9%
Comfort Zone	12	8.3%	4	2.8%
Second Language	12	8.3%	4	2.8%
Better Informed	24	16.6%	7	5.0%
Prof. Demeanor	12	8.3%	20	14.0%
Other	12	8.3%	7	4.9%

Table 9 indicates that students begin their internship semester with a broad range of aspirational goals/objectives that are aimed at personal self-improvement. Type II-Salience/Uncertainty is especially evident among students who hope to chart a new path of personal growth during their internship semester, especially in the critical areas of emotional development (51.7%), organizational skills (46.7%), healthier lifestyles (26.2%), communication skills (26%), cosmopolitanism (22.1%), etc. The prevalence of Type II-Salience/Uncertainty in personal goals/objectives suggests a strong propensity among many students to view the internship experience as a unique opportunity for an "e*xistential makeover;*" i.e., to re-make themselves into more disciplined, healthier, self-assured, articulate, and open-minded individuals.

As noted earlier, many students harbored the urgency for personal renewal before their internship began; or it emerged rather quickly within the first couple of weeks of their internship semester. In either scenario, the underlying assumption in many student narratives is that charting a course of personal renewal requires physical separation from their home institutions. The concern therein is that students may imbue their internships with an overly inflated sense of

expectation, namely that the internship semester will yield more personal growth than is reasonable to anticipate. Smaller proportions of students also expressed a strong desire to experience independence for the first time; to become less risk-averse by self-consciously stepping out of their "comfort zones;" to become better informed and more intellectually curious individuals; and to project a more professional demeanor.

The exercise of articulating personal goals is potentially invaluable in two respects. The first is that the narrative allows students to create a benchmark for their own self-evaluation at the end of the internship semester. Several students also utilized the LOS/IDP statement of personal goals as a guidepost that enabled them to stay focused and disciplined throughout the semester. Second, the LOS/IDP can provide faculty and program advisors a stronger foundation for tailoring their supervision of interns with much greater precision and effectiveness, not merely as an assessment tool at the end of the internship semester.

The LOS/IDP data on personal goals highlight a seemingly paradoxical quality in the narrative structure of the (self) representations students construct for their portfolios. On the one hand, the intern cohort in the study exhibits Very High Type I-Salience/Certainty for both academic and professional goals. On the other, the internship portfolios collectively manifest Very High Type II-Salience/Uncertainty in the self-referential narratives on personal goals. Thus, interns convey minimal levels of uncertainty about their nascent careers, but exhibit an extraordinarily high level of uncertainty about their personal growth.

As noted previously, the literature on internships clearly stipulates that a central motivation for students in undertaking internships is that the para-professional experience they accrue will contribute significantly to their career trajectories. Prospective interns therefore tend to imbue their internships with a substantial degree of meaning. The anticipation, indeed the expectation, is that their investment of time and money, as well as the opportunity costs of foregoing a

semester at their home institutions, will yield actual dividends for their career goals. What is less developed in the literature is the concomitant level of meaning that many students attach to their internship experience about their personal growth and development. The vast majority of students in the present study also anticipate, though may not fully expect, that the experiential learning context of an internship will provide a singular opportunity to address a litany of personal issues that will hinder their career goals if left unresolved. This Type II-Salience/Uncertainty is expressed across a range of markers for self-improvement (i.e., organizational skills, self-confidence, assertiveness, interpersonal skills, health, and the like). The narratives on personal goals, and the breadth of issues they identify, suggest that students seriously entertain the prospect for personal growth and renewal that they believe is presented by their internship semester.

A comparison of the (personal growth) narratives in the LOS/IDPs and the FDLs yields some interesting observations. Although the number of students who expressed Type II-Salience/Uncertainty about personal goals in the LOS/IDPs and FDLs was virtually identical, 145 and 144 respectively, the proportion that addressed the whole range of personal goals declined markedly from the beginning to the end of the internship semester, except for two categories: Emotional Development and Professional Demeanor. The proportion of students that attached Type II-Salience/Uncertainty to Emotional Development increased from 51.7% in the LOS/IDPs to 61.1% in the FDLs. A more modest proportionate increase is evident among the portfolio narratives that identify professional demeanor as an important personal goal; from 8.3% in LOS/IDPs to 14% in the FDLs.

Thus, for the intern cohort as a whole, Type II-Salience/Uncertainty for emotional development and professional demeanor increased while the salience for all the other (personal

growth) issues decreased; some quite dramatically, like organizational skills, healthy lifestyle, communication skills, cosmopolitanism, and being better informed. The scope of the present study cannot ascertain definitively why some interns were quite expansive about certain personal goals in their LOS/IDPs but did not mention them in the FDLs. A plausible reason can be surmised from the portfolios that contain narratives about specific categories of personal goals in both the LOS/IDPs and the FDLs. The vast majority of those narratives indicate that the students perceive themselves as having successfully achieved the specific goals they identified in the LOS/IDPs. Only a few students described their failure, or inability, to meet the specific personal goals they articulated for themselves at the beginning of their internship semester. Students who identified specific goals in the LOS/IDPs but omitted them in the FDLs may have simply felt ambivalent about those goals, having not quite succeeded, or even failed, in meeting them.

Theme Two (Decision Points)

The second theme for hypothesis-formulation is whether students utilize internships to arrive at decision points regarding their career trajectories. This dynamic may be revealed in one of two ways in the internship portfolios. First, students may state explicitly in the LOS/IDPs that they intend to use the internship experience to arrive at a specific decision about their career goals. The status of that decision would presumably be reflected in their FDLs. Alternately, other students may not view their internship as a decision point in the LOS/IDPs, but do so in their FDLs.

A review of the study's 170 LOS/IDPs indicates that 38 (22.4%) students expected to arrive at a (career) decision point in the course of their internship semester. However, by the time students were asked to construct their FDL narratives in the last couple of weeks of the internship semester an additional 26 (64, or 37.6%) interns indicated that their internship represented a career decision point. Among the 38 portfolios that initially indicated the internship represented a decision point, six did not ascribe Type II-Salience/Uncertainty to their decisions in the FDLs.

Their portfolio narratives indicate that they arrived at a decision about a specific career goal by the time their FDLs were written. Their decision points therefore shifted from Type II-Salience/Uncertainty in their LOS/IDPs to Type I-Salience/Certainty in their FDLs.

The number of interns for whom the internship experience represented a decision point increased 68% (38 to 64) from the LOS/IDPs to the FDLs. The implication of this finding is that the experiential learning context of an internship in terms of para-professional experience, mentoring, networks of contacts, and exposure to a broader range of career options engenders a shift in some students from Type I- to Type II-Salience in regard to their career trajectories. Twenty-two of the 26 interns who expressed Type II-Salience/Uncertainty in the FDLs, but not in the LOS/IDPs, did so in relation to professional goals. The other four made consequential decisions about educational plans, political party affiliation, or a long-term commitment to a specific civic engagement organization. Overall, among the 64 students who attached Type II-Salience/Uncertainty to a decision point in their FDLs, 52 contemplated consequential decisions that relate to their professional trajectories; 12 deliberated about decisions regarding their educational goals, and 3 made long-term decisions about a particular type of civic engagement, political party affiliation, or study abroad option.

A not insignificant minority of students commenced their internship experience with a clear intention to arrive at decision point about a specific career goal. At the end of the internship semester that proportion increased by fifteen percentage points to 37.6%. While that group still represents a minority of the entire intern cohort, it is important for faculty, internship advisors, as well as students themselves, to be cognizant of the possibility that the experiential learning context of an internship may engender a propensity in some students to review and perhaps revise certain career decisions they had presumed were largely settled (i.e., Type I-Salience/Certainty).

Theme Three (Critical Junctures):

Prospective interns do not apply for a semester-long internship with a conscious expectation that it will represent a critical juncture in their lives; i.e., a marker that charts a new and previously unanticipated career or personal trajectory. Most students clearly believe that an internship will certainly enable them to significantly enhance the prospects of actually fulfilling what are largely predetermined career goals. Their underlying assumption is that what remains to be established is how far along their current trajectories the internship will enable them to travel. At the personal level, most students believe an internship in Washington, D.C. will be an opportunity to make new friends, enjoy the social and cultural life of the nation's capital, and to sample an urban environment (a frequent interest among suburban students). A few students even express enthusiasm about the prospects of living independently of their parents for the first time in their lives. But, it is rare indeed for a prospective intern to envision an internship semester as a potentially transformative experience; i.e., a point of reference that will influence and shape the rest of their professional and personal lives. Even students who hope an internship will bring clarity to their career aspirations do not typically envision an internship as a "life-changing" experience.

A number of former students recall attending recruitment sessions at which internships were described as transformative experiences. Their reaction to such language was that such characterizations are nothing more than marketing rhetoric. A virtual consensus exists among prospective interns that a semester in Washington, D.C. will be a new, fun, and exhilarating college adventure; not that it will alter their sense of self at a basic existential level. However, anecdotal testimonials from former interns and unsystematic readings of internship portfolios over several years suggest that a close, structured analysis of internship portfolios, and the FDLs in particular, can yield instructive observations about how interns perceive the personal changes they undergo in the course of their internship semester.

From a methodological standpoint, it should be noted that TWC's FDL guidelines do not prompt interns to frame their self-evaluations of LOS/IDPs personal goals in language that

characterizes the internship experience as a critical juncture in their nascent careers. Thus, textual references in the FDLs to that effect are largely authentic self-representations of what they perceive to be a highly consequential period of their lives. A content analysis of portfolio FDLs suggests that the phraseology a majority of students invoke to describe the impact of the internship on their personal lives indicates the experience was indeed akin to a critical juncture. The 170 portfolio FDLs were coded as either "Not a Critical Juncture" or "A Critical Juncture" if the students characterized their internships with phrases that suggest the experience altered their self-representation or career trajectory (educational and professional goals/objectives).

The vast majority of the 170 interns, 137 (or 80.6%) made textural references that indicate they view their internship experience as a critical juncture in their lives. The thematic content of their FDL narratives was coded to indicate whether the students perceived the internship experience as having made a consequential difference in their career (careerist-educational or professional) or personal (existentialist-personal growth) trajectories. Among the 137 interns who viewed their internships as critical junctures, 49 narratives (35.8%) pertain to careerist goals whereas the referent for 88 (or 64.2%) is existentialist. This suggests that for the intern cohort the perception that the internship was very consequential for personal growth belongs to the level of High Type II-Salience/Uncertainty, whereas the cohort is only in the Moderate Type II-Salience/Uncertainty for the careerist category. These data are consistent with the discussion in Theme One (Uncertainty), in which internship portfolios convey a broader range of Type II-Salience/Uncertainty for personal growth than is the case for career goals.

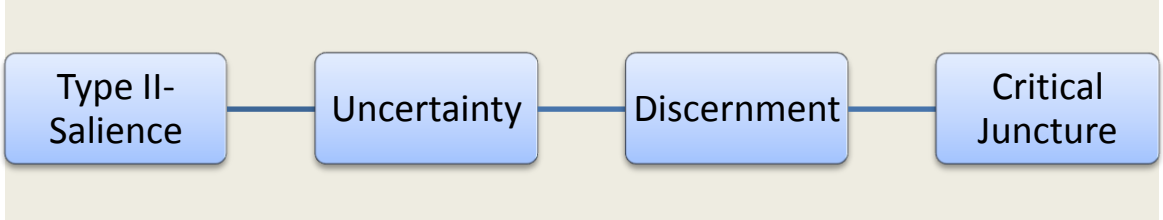
This finding contravenes the underlying assumption of the internship literature that if experiential learning represents a critical juncture for young adults it must necessarily occur in the realm of careerist goals/objectives. The assumption is not as much incorrect as it is only partially true. Internships are certainly consequential for students' careerist aspirations, but the scholarly literature underestimates how consequential they can also be for personal growth. The discussion in Theme One (Uncertainty) concludes with the possibility that the impact of an internship on personal growth may be more resonant than even career development in the self-

representations students construct in their internship portfolios. In short, interns may well perceive an internship as having a more consequential impact on their development as young adults than even in the realm of career development.

However, that conclusion must itself be placed within its proper methodological context. Experiential learning can be profoundly consequential on multiple levels or trajectories (e.g. career development and personal growth). The structures of meaning (Type I & II-Salience) students attach to one level or the other are not reducible to a simple zero-sum proposition across what are essentially distinct and parallel, though certainly not unrelated, trajectories. Nor are these structures of meaning necessarily ordered hierarchically; one level of salience is not intrinsically superior to another.

There are two ways in which internships are potentially consequential for students. The first is consistent with Type I-Salience/Certainty in which an internship semester significantly reinforces, or markedly accelerates, a student's progression along previously established trajectories of career development and personal growth. The appropriate categorization for this mode of (consequential) experiential learning can be termed Enhancement (hence, Type I-Salience/Certainty-Enhancement). The second is what is herein termed a "Critical Juncture." That category more precisely captures the impact of an internship if it substantially ameliorates or resolves lingering uncertainty by presenting new trajectories of career development and/or personal growth (i.e., Type II-Salience/Uncertainty-Discernment/Critical Juncture).

Diagram 3: Structures of Meaning (3)



Theme Four (Integration)

The fourth theme of analytic interest refers to a key rationale for granting academic credit for internship placements, namely that they present unique opportunities to integrate academic training with hands-on, para-professional experience. That rationale begs the question of whether students generally expect their internships to achieve this integration. The qualitative data in the LOS/IDPs and FDLs were coded to indicate whether students valued such integration at either the beginning or the end of their internship semesters, or if integration was simply not important at either or both points. Among the 170 internship portfolios only 43 students (or, 25.3%) made explicit textual references in their LOS/IDPs that signaled an anticipation that integration would occur within the experiential learning context of their internship. As noted earlier, the LOS/IDPs are typically written within the first two weeks of an internship semester, and are constructed according to guidelines provided by TWC's program advisers. Within the scope of the study it is not possible to establish whether students valued integration before they arrived in Washington, D.C., or if they did so primarily in response to prompts implicit in the LOS/IDP guidelines.

Under either scenario, a majority (74.7%) of the students in the internship cohort did not frame their expectations for their internship in terms of achieving an integration of academic training with the para-professional experience an internship placement provides. Through the course of the internship semester, however, that proportion decreased markedly to 49.8%. Conversely, one-in-four students valued integration in the LOS/IDPs and one-in-two did so in the FDLs. The students who initially expressed an interest in integration at the beginning of the internship semester may well have done so in response to prompts in the LOS/IDPs. But, as the semester progressed a number of interns also began to recognize integration as a constituent element of experiential learning. Two recurring themes throughout the FDLs are that interns

learned more during their internships than any other semester at their home institution; and that what they learned simply could not have occurred in any context other than the internship. The implication of the latter theme is that the integration between academic training and hands-on, para-professional-experience is only possible within the experiential learning framework of an internship.

Although experiential learning is incorporated into the curricular and co-curricular life of Richard Stockton College, the students who valued integration in the study clearly conceptualized experiential learning as categorically distinct from what is offered at their home institution; i.e., not just as a difference in degree but a difference in kind. That view is not without merit. Experiential learning is conventionally structured as either a service learning component to a traditional course, or as a credit-bearing, local internship for a few hours a week. In either configuration the experience is essentially an adjunct to a student's traditional curriculum. The experiential learning context of an internship in Washington, D.C., however, can be differentiated from this conventional understanding in several respects. First, the essential difference is that an internship experience is not an adjunct to, but at the core of, a student's curriculum. Second, an internship is a totalizing experience:

> 1) Students uproot themselves from their home institution for an entire semester.
> 2) They live in a residential community entirely comprised of fellow interns from all over the United States and several other countries.
> 3) Their placement is a full-time job that fully integrates them into a professional environment (with all its attendant responsibilities, mores, and norms).
> 4) They are required to complete an array of academic tasks, including all reading and writing assignments for their seminar, journals, and a series of written narratives for their internship portfolios.
> 5) Their grades and academic credits for the entire semester are completely predicated on how successfully they complete all their internship requirements.

Third, many students characterize their internship semester as the most "intense" period of their undergraduate careers. For most interns the pace is frenetic; they spend several hours a week commuting to and from their placement sites and seminars, work full-time at their internships, attend weekly academic seminars, participate in numerous workshops, fulfill civic engagement requirements, and enjoy the rich social and cultural life of the nation's capital.

The intensity of the internship engenders a propensity among many interns to acquire strategies for successfully managing the range of requirements and expectations they must satisfy throughout their internship semester. They learn to economize through more effective time-management skills and financial budgeting in order to maximize opportunities for personal enrichment. The internship portfolios indicate that a similar dynamic occurs in their para-professional lives. Upon commencing their internships, students immediately conclude that success will be predicated on having a steep learning curve at their placement sites. That entails the ability to draw connections within a network of resources; i.e., academic training, the internship seminar, the mentoring and supervision at placement sites, and what is for many interns a new urgency to read newspapers on a daily basis. Thus, some students are clearly cognizant of the importance of integrating academics with para-professional experience before they arrive in Washington, D.C. For many other interns that imperative emerges within the experiential learning context of an internship through LOS/IDP guidelines, or as function of utilizing the network of resources available to them.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

An internship has a remarkable potential to be an immensely consequential experience in the career and personal trajectories of undergraduate students. As noted in the present study, most prospective interns anticipate that the value and benefits of an internship semester will accrue primarily, if not exclusively, to their career goals. Aside from the obvious social and cultural amenities that are so pervasive in the nation's capital, most students do not anticipate, as they apply to the internship program, that the experience will also be very consequential for their personal growth. The phrase, "a life-changing experience" is not one that resonates with prospective interns; however, it is frequently invoked in their FDLs to capture the profound impact of the internship semester on their career development and personal growth, especially the latter.

The study proceeded from the assumption that all prospective interns attach salience to their academic, professional, and personal goals. The opportunity costs of an internship are too substantial for these goals not to be salient. The study also postulated that salience is not uni-dimensional; for some interns it is grounded in certainty and a sense of settledness about the content of their goals. For other students, uncertainty and flux characterize the salience of their career and personal goals. The purpose of an internship for the former group is to significantly enhance the achievement of their pre-established goals. The latter group has a somewhat different purpose; i.e., to engage in discernment about their goals. As the study outlines, students engage their internships from one or the other of these two pathways.

However, interns are not tethered to only one pathway for all their goals. Indeed, as the study indicates the pathway of Type I-Salience/Certainty-Enhancement describes the trajectory for a majority of the intern cohort in regard to career (academic and professional) goals, while Type

II-Salience/Uncertainty-Discernment captures the experience of the vast majority of the intern cohort in terms of personal goals. The clear implication of this conclusion for purposes of hypothesis-formulation is:

1) **Hypothesis #1:** T*he type of salience interns attach to their goals is variable across different types of goals (i.e., academic, professional, personal).*

The study indicates that a majority of the intern cohort is on the Type I-Salience/Certainty pathway for career goals, and a somewhat larger majority of the same cohort embraces Type II-Salience/Uncertainty for personal goals. The case study is based on an intern cohort from the same institution. The study sample (170) is not randomized across different types of institutions and internship programs. Therefore, the generalizability of the study's findings is limited in this regard. However, as an intensive case study, the finding contributes to the internship literature by formulating the hypothesis, for further testing with randomized samples, that interns attach variable levels of salience to academic, professional, and personal goals.

The study also established that many students view the purpose of an internship as essentially an effort to significantly enhance career goals, the specificity of which is largely certain and settled. For other students that purpose is defined more in terms of enabling them to discern, i.e., to further refine and even revise, their goals. This finding can be expressed in the following hypothesis:

2) **Hypothesis #2:** *Students conceptualize the essential purpose of an internship as either enhancing pre-established goals or as discerning goals which are emergent or inchoate.*

Another potentially significant finding of the study is that internships are utilized by students to arrive at specific decision points about their career goals. Interns either begin their internships

with this objective clearly in mind, or it emerges in the course of the internship semester. The present study found that slightly more one-fifth of the intern cohort used the internship as a decision point at the beginning of the internship. That proportion increased by fifteen percentage points by the time students wrote their FDLs. This finding can contribute to the following hypothesis:

3) **Hypothesis #3:** *Internships represent decision points in the career trajectories of students; moreover, this inclination increases as an internship semester progresses.*

The relative distribution of the intern cohort along the two pathways outlined in the study (Type I-Salience/Certainty-Enhancement and Type II-Salience/Uncertainty-Discernment) suggests that students do not proceed along one pathway throughout the entirety of their internship semester. Indeed, the clear pattern is that a majority of students pursues career goals on the Type I-Salience/Certainty pathway for career goals, and a majority is on the Type II-Salience/Certainty pathway for personal goals. This pattern is incorporated into the following hypothesis:

4) Hypothesis #4: *The type of salience students attach to their goals is predicated on whether they are career or personal goals.*

Another finding of the study is that the internship experience represents a critical juncture in the career and personal trajectories of a vast majority of the intern cohort (80.6%). A larger proportion of those students view the internship as a critical juncture in their personal, as opposed to their career trajectories (64.2% and 35.8%, respectively). This potentially significant finding can be expressed in the following hypothesis:

5) **Hypothesis #5:** *Students are more likely to experience their internships as "critical junctures" in their personal trajectories, than is the case with career goals.*

The final conclusion of the study is that, throughout the course of the internship semester, students increasingly seek to draw connections among their academic training in their major field of study, the academic seminar during their internship semester, and the para-professional experience of their internship placement. At the beginning of the semester approximately one-in-four students attached importance to the possibility of integrating their academic and para-professional experiences. That ratio increased to one-in-two by the time the FDLs were written. This finding can be expressed in the following hypothesis:

6) **Hypothesis #6:** *The experiential learning context of an internship engenders a propensity among students to seek integration between their academic and para-professional lives.*

The likely source for that propensity is the totalizing dimensions of an internship semester, and how they engender a higher level of acuity among students in terms of seeking integration between their academic and para-professional experiences.

The present study suggests that the manner in which individual students engage their internships is not entirely reducible to idiosyncratic differences among students. There are at least two broad patterns of approaching internships, in general; and in relation to specific types of goals (e.g. academic, professional and personal). The purpose of the study thus far has been to analyze the LOS/IDPs in the internship portfolios in order to contribute to hypothesis-formulation. The study has secondary purpose; i.e., to utilize the analyses herein to propose specific recommendations to strengthen the internship experience; recommendations that will make the experience even more meaningful and consequential for the career and personal trajectories of students. While the recommendations are specific to Richard Stockton College, they may find broader applicability among institutions with internship programs that are configured somewhat differently.

Recommendation #1: *Broaden the process of goal articulation and self-evaluation*.

The first recommendation is to re-conceptualize the process of goal articulation and self-evaluation so that it begins before students arrive in Washington, D.C. and extends well beyond the completion of their internship program. The recommendation envisions the process as a series of successive stages of goal articulation and self-evaluation. The first stage should occur as prospective interns apply to an internship program but have yet to receive their internship placement. At this point, students can give fuller expression to the aspirational dimensions of their goals and objectives without conflating them with the particular academic and para-professional responsibilities at their internship sites. The internship adviser can require a writing assignment (a pre-internship narrative, or PIN) as part of the application process. Students can expound on their (academic, professional, civic engagement, and personal) goals and objectives, not just for their impending internship but for their longer-term future as well. This proposed writing assignment could be submitted to, and evaluated by, an internship adviser at a student's home institution and included as the first installment of an internship portfolio.

The second stage would essentially be what students presently undertake in writing the LOS/IDPs; i.e., to articulate the four types (academic, professional, civic engagement, and personal) of goals and objectives in light of their specific internship responsibilities. However, the current assignment would be revised so that the point of reference for the exercise would be not only the internship responsibilities for their specific placement, but also the more aspirational goals outlined in the PIN.

The third stage also mirrors what interns currently produce in the form of the FDL. As noted previously, this writing assignment also occurs while the internship is ongoing. The self-evaluation is conditioned by the realization among students that the strong bonds of affection

they develop within their experiential learning community are about to end. This invariably influences the tone and content of the FDL and constitutes another point of reference as interns conduct their own self-evaluations. Nonetheless, the exercise reveals important insights into the developmental trajectory of students as they complete what is for many a profoundly meaningful and consequential experience. The recommendation herein is to structure the FDL writing assignment to reflect not just on the LOS/IDP, but on the aspirational map outlined in the PIN as well. This recommendation could also minimize the possibility that the FDL self-evaluation will be asymmetric in tone; i.e., over-emphasizing how students perceive themselves at the end of the internship and de-emphasizing the breadth and depth of experience and growth over the course of the entire internship semester. This revision would ensure that all relevant points of reference are more fully integrated into the FDL: i.e., the pre-internship period (the PIN), the initial period of immersion into the internship (the LOS/IDP), and the final period of the internship (the FDL). Thus, the internship portfolio, which is presently submitted at the end of the internship semester for purposes of evaluation and grading would include three documents in the expanded portfolio framework envisioned herein: the Pre-Internship Narrative (a PIN), the LOS/IPD and the FDL.

The fourth stage of articulation/evaluation for student interns ought to occur at least five years after a student has completed an internship experience. This exercise would entail providing former interns a copy of their PINs, LOS/IDPs, and FDLs, and asking them to write a Post-Internship Reflection (a PIR) in which they reflect on how their internship experience influenced the broader arc of their professional and personal trajectories, especially after their internship experience. The PIR exercise could be conducted completely online. An intern alum would log into a secure portal and access their PINS, LOS/IDPs, and FDLs. After reviewing the documents they would write the PIR in light of the goals and (self) evaluations of the previous documents.

The purpose of the PIR would be two-fold: 1) to allow intern alums to evaluate the entire trajectory of their career development and personal growth, since their PINS; and 2) to focus specifically on how their internship influenced their careers after completing their undergraduate degrees. The qualitative data from this exercise could provide faculty and internship advisers, administrators, parents, and prospective college students with invaluable information about the potential impact of an intensive experiential learning environment, like a semester-long internship in the nation's capital.

Recommendation #2: *Broaden the network of advising*.

As presently configured, the internship program provides ample advising resources in Washington, D.C. These include a program adviser from TWC, a placement site supervisor, a faculty adviser, and a residential life adviser. In terms of their home institution, interns have ongoing supervision from their campus liaison, the instructor-of-record for the academic credits. Apart from the campus liaison, interns effectively suspend engagement with their networks of support at their home institutions. The recommendation herein is to provide a framework for interns to continue to benefit from the encouragement, affirmation, and guidance from these networks while they are in Washington, D.C. An important component of these networks is the role the preceptor (or faculty adviser) plays in the undergraduate careers of students. In consultation with the deans of the various schools, the campus liaison could provide the preceptors of interns the PINs and the LOS/IDPs. These narratives could enable preceptors to have a more nuanced understanding of how their preceptees are activating structures of meaning to achieve their career and personal goals. Once TWC provides the campus liaison the midterm evaluations for all the interns they can also be distributed to the preceptors with students in the internship program. A meeting of all these preceptors could be convened at the William J.

Hughes Center for Public Policy to discuss the progress of the interns, collectively and individually, in light of the PINS, the LOS/IDPs, and the midterm evaluations. This process could enable preceptors to offer specific guidance to their (intern) preceptees based on these three documents.

Recommendation #3: ***Establish a network of intern alumni chapters.***

The Washington internship program at Richard Stockton College began in the early 1970s; since then over 1,100 Stockton students have completed internships in Washington, D.C. Many of those intern alums live and work in the mid-Atlantic region. At present, the interaction between current and former interns is limited to an annual reception held at TWC's headquarters. Intern alums can provide invaluable mentoring, professional guidance, networks of contacts, and even financial support (through scholarships). Therefore, the recommendation herein is for the Stockton College internship program to work with the Office of Alumni Affairs to establish intern alum chapters in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, southern New Jersey, and New York City. Additionally, an online directory of intern alumni could be provided to current interns so they establish mentoring relationships with alumni who share similar career goals.

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