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An Investigation of Experiential Learning: A Program Evaluation of the William & Mary D.C. Summer Institutes

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AN INVESTIGATION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING:

A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE WILLIAM & MARY D.C. SUMMER INSTITUTES

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Dedication

The William & Mary (W&M) Washington Center D.C. Summer Institutes (DCSI) program evaluation has been an incredibly valuable tool in assessing current Study in DC practices at the Center. The findings will hopefully prove useful as W&M considers a path to internships for all students, and helpful for donors who may be considering why giving to internship program scholarships matters so greatly. It has been a great privilege to serve in the W&M Washington Center for the past 16 years and a joy to reconnect with DCSI students from as far back as 2010 who shared memories and stories of their time in D.C. It is my responsibility to ensure their time was well spent and that we use this information to increase program effectiveness, quality, and access. I am committed to all three goals.

This work is dedicated to all the students who have come through the W&M Washington Center since 2006, the Washington Center team (past and present), the incredible faculty who have taught in our programs, and to the alumni who have volunteered and given their talent and treasure to help our students find success and career fulfillment. I also dedicate this program evaluation to future Study in DC students who I hope can access these opportunities so that we may serve them well on their professional journeys.

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

The principal purpose of this program evaluation was to determine how the 2010–2019 alumni of the William & Mary (W&M) D.C. Summer Institutes (DCSI) perceived their participation helped them achieve career readiness. Existing literature on experiential learning methods and practices has suggested great value in such opportunities, but less information existed about the outcomes of internship programs in higher education. As leaders consider what their institutional operations look like following the COVID-19 global pandemic and demand for quality internships rises, research on what works in high-impact programs, such as DCSI, offer valuable data for faculty, administrators, and students. A total of 449 DCSI alumni spanning the first 10 years of the program were invited to participate in an electronic survey, followed by the option to interview to discuss the topic and their experiences in more detail. I analyzed the resulting quantitative and qualitative data to determine if DCSI outcomes aligned with program intentions. The findings suggested overall, DCSI alumni perceived an increase in their career readiness as a result of their participation, with the biggest increase in their professionalism. Women and students of color perceived higher levels of readiness overall and in multiple career competencies than their male and White counterparts. This evaluation highlighted the need for universities to increase access to internship programs for all students, especially women and students of color. First-generation and low-income students in particular would benefit by participating in internship opportunities, which may be especially effective for increasing career readiness.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The origins of experiential learning date back more than a century to Dewey (1916) and his progressive education theory that argued experience is essential to education. More recently, experiential learning opportunities (e.g., internship programs) have been included under the umbrella of high-impact practices (HIPs), a term coined by Kuh (2008, as cited in National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). HIPs have served as an increasing focus of discussion in both K–12 (Scogin et al., 2017) and higher education (Kuh et al., 2017) settings. The identification of HIPs has given educators in higher education a framework to thoughtfully consider the outcomes of their teaching and offer specific, defining characteristics (e.g., student expectations and intentional reflections) to guide pedagogy (Kuh et al., 2013). Although adopting HIPs can require more faculty effort in shifting from more traditional teaching and learning that was lecture oriented and faculty centered (Barr & Tagg, 1995), the benefits are worth it because of the role HIPs play to increase student learning.

HIPs indeed "demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback. [For students, though,] participation can be life-changing" (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2021, p. 1). For example, Helyer and Lee (2014) described the positive outcomes of one HIP as central to students' learning and abilities to cope with career demands after college. Similarly, Simons et al. (2012) discussed enhanced career and cultural competencies and personal and professional

development as a direct result of another HIP. With evidence mounting for the use of HIPs in higher education, these strategies warrant consideration by all educators.

HIPs are defined as "activities that make a claim on student time and energy in ways that deepen learning and change the way students think and act" (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007, p. 9). These activities can occur in or outside the classroom and include research, internships, capstone classes, and more. Prince (2004) defined active learning, a similarly used broad term as experiential learning, as "any instructional method that engages students in the learning process…[and]…requires students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing" (p. 223). Active learning can also take place in or outside the classroom. Experiential learning, however, definitively moves beyond the classroom and can be described as an "empowering experience that allows [students] to capitalize on their practical strengths while testing the application of ideas discussed in the classroom" (D. A. Kolb, 2015, p. 6). In all models of experiential learning, guided reflection plays a key role in helping students make meaning from their experiences and is crucial to the experiential learning process. Reflection is a foundational element in D. A. Kolb's (1984) four-stage experiential learning cycle and is an essential HIP characteristic.

Internship programs, which are included in the general list of HIPs, are a form of experiential learning. Experiential learning can sometimes be referred to as authentic learning. According to Endersby and Maheux-Pelletier (2020):

> When the experience is authentic, students acquire knowledge and intellectual skills that equip them to understand how they and their field of study relate to their broader context. Any real-world or real-world-like experiences…may serve as opportunities to understand if and how their newly acquired knowledge applies beyond an academic setting and to

> generate an academically rigorous response to the issue they observe and experience through critical reflection. (p. 61)

Whatever the term or definition (e.g., HIPs, active learning, experiential learning, authentic learning), each speaks to the idea of learning by doing.

For the purposes of my research, I focused on experiential learning, specifically learning that occurs in a summer program that uses internships completed in conjunction with reflection and other related programming (e.g., faculty-led academic integration) to create a cohesive experience for students. Although an integrated internship program would qualify as a HIP, I concentrated on outcomes related to one internship-based experiential learning program that includes academic content delivered by faculty to complement students' time in active engagement in the workplace. This research concentrated on an internship-based program, including the internship and other program elements that scaffolded the experiential learning.

Learning by doing has gained increased attention over time, with K–12 educators first generally embracing and adopting the idea in their classrooms (A. Harvey, 2021). In higher education, however, strategies including experiences in students' educations have ranged widely, with an array of challenges and varying degrees of success (Cowart, 2010); for some, "the success achieved is circumspect" (Nayar & Koul, 2020, p. 1358). As A. Harvey (2021) noted, "Higher education contexts, in general, may be a more complicated environment for designing curricular to include active learning activities compared to K–12 settings" (p. 8). Challenges on a college campus to incorporate more experiential learning may be due in part to faculty independence, variability between schools and departments, large class sizes, and the challenge of connecting experiences to learning outcomes and credit (Cox et al., 2013; Lund Dean & Wright, 2017; Mantai & Huber, 2021).

Experiential learning in higher education requires professors to guide students beyond active learning, where students are asked to engage with their own learning in an active way that moves learning to an experience outside of the classroom where students apply theory to practice and reflect to make connections. However, Kuh (2008) argued even active learning practices do not happen consistently, as "on almost all campuses, utilization of active learning practices is unsystematic, to the detriment of student learning" (p. 9). Even though Kuh's research occurred a dozen years ago, it is just as true today, with definitions and classroom practices varying widely (Hartikainen et al., 2019). Active learning is an important element in experiential learning, but higher education faculty members have struggled to offer students the opportunity to engage with their own learning consistently.

Despite potential challenges, the growing role of both active and experiential learning since the 1990s has caught the attention of campus leaders and educators. Bonwell and Eison (1991) argued for higher education to move out of the lecture comfort zone by encouraging faculty to take risks and embrace a more active learning model. Lecture has long been a teaching method on which faculty have continued to rely (Werner et al., 2018), with experiential learning extending opportunities to help students apply classroom theory to practice. Experiential learning opportunities can help students maximize their time in college by offering them a way to make connections between theory and practice and apply their learning to careers after graduation.

Participating in an internship program, for example, allows students to put their classroom learning into practice at a professional institution outside of the university setting and apply knowledge in a meaningful way. Yet, internship programs as a form of experiential learning are not always widely available nor accessible to students. Similarly, not all internship

programs offer HIPs, and outcomes subsequently vary (Hora et al., 2020). Students who can access internship programs are likely to have varying experiences.

The challenge of providing high-impact experiential learning opportunities, such as internship programs, is not the only issue facing higher education. Most notably, beset by the COVID-19 global pandemic, many financially strapped colleges and universities have been forced to demonstrate their value and show students what return on their investment they can expect with an oftentimes costly degree (Carrns, 2021). Decreasing enrollments, although due in part to a decline in high school graduation rates (Grawe, 2017), could also be a sign that students no longer value the traditional learning environment. Internship programs may be part of the answer to enrollment challenges and efforts to improve student outcomes. The combination of an internship experience with faculty-led academic content, alumni relationship building and professional networking, and regularly guided reflection is fundamental to helping students make connections that go beyond the university setting and into life and careers after graduation (Aoun, 2017).

If institutions of higher education want to produce graduates who are equipped and qualified for jobs and ultimately their careers, "the time has come for colleges and universities to make participating in high-impact activities a reality—and a priority—for every student" (Kuh, 2008, p. 22). Indeed, there has been an increase in experiential learning pedagogies in higher education in recent years (Hora et al., 2020), and some institutions have taken up Kuh's call to action. These institutions have "undergone major curriculum and pedagogical reforms and their systematic implementation in the past 2 decades. Efforts to implement higher engagement teaching tools have been undertaken" (Nayar & Koul, 2020, p. 1358).

Amid a time of increased accountability in higher education, internship programs are likely to be in elevated demand as students expect to graduate career ready and readily hirable. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2019) noted, "Career readiness is the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace" (p. 1). NACE (2019) put forth eight core competencies of career readiness:

1. critical thinking/problem solving
2. oral/written communications
3. teamwork/collaboration
4. digital technology
5. leadership
6. professionalism/work ethic
7. career management
8. global/intercultural fluency. (p. 1)

These competencies are a useful guide for educators and students and can offer a framework for intended internship program learning outcomes. According to Pitchford et al. (2020), authentic learning approaches—such as those occurring in internship programs—can significantly affect how students learn and help them apply their learning to careers and lives beyond college. Research on the most effective internship program elements (Seifert et al., 2014), which contribute to the HIPs, suggested the following seven principles of good practice:

- student–faculty contact
- cooperation among students
- active learning

- prompt feedback to students
- time on task
- high expectations
- respect for diverse students and diverse ways of knowing. (p. 533)

Internship programs are designed to increase career readiness and help students develop core NACE competencies. Through the listed practices, programs can enhance students' learning and preparedness for careers after college. Still, ambiguity exists around whether internship programs do what they claim and whether programs use the principles and produce career ready graduates. There is a gap in literature, however, regarding whether internship programs—whether intentionally devised based on best practices or not—consistently produce career ready graduates.

Specialized internship programs, such as William & Mary's (W&M) D.C. Summer Institutes (DCSI), that integrate the internship experience with additional support features intend to offer students increased career readiness. DCSI was designed to support student learning and help students make connections to careers beyond college, but the initial design work for the program was not informed by literature on high-impact best practices to produce career ready graduates. What remained unknown, therefore, was how DCSI influenced alumni career readiness. After this DCSI program evaluation, however, administrators have realized how critical it is to align practices with existing research, so the W&M Washington Center now incorporates research-informed information into new program design and existing operations.

According to Zilvinskis (2019), "although internships are prominently advertised on institutional websites, very little is known about the learning outcomes associated with them…quality concerns associated with internships include the way that students connect what

they learn to the real world" (p. 689). The ability to connect the practical internship experience to careers after college is paramount to an internship program and requires intentional, guided reflection. The utility of an internship is it allows students to experience the real world and then consider their fit in a given field and organization. To help make those connections between a college education and a career postgraduation, "internships are being increasingly touted as valuable high-impact practice" (Hora et al., 2020, p. 1); yet internships alone remain understudied and are therefore of unknown value for students. Similarly, higher education professionals do not know if students in more integrated internship programs report increased career readiness. Herein lies a problem of practice. Higher education professionals may not know how students value internship programs nor how graduates perceive the programs prepare them for their careers.

Experiential Learning at W&M

W&M provides students with a vast array of experiential learning opportunities, including community engagement, spring break programs, student-led research, departmental internships, and robust study abroad options. W&M also offers several opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in experiential learning under the Washington Center's Study in D.C. umbrella. One such program is DCSI, which features internship experiences intentionally linked with academics, alumni, career exploration, and reflection. In the following investigation of the DCSI program offered by the W&M Washington Center, I sought to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of DCSI program elements over the first 10 years of student cohorts (2010–2019). The primary indicator of effectiveness for this program evaluation was DCSI graduates' perceptions of their career readiness after participating in DCSI. My intended

outcome of this program evaluation was to inform program managers about ways to improve operations.

DCSI Program Description

The W&M Washington Center was established in 2001. According to internal documents, the impetus for founding the Center initially was the large alumni population in D.C. area and the general idea that in D.C., W&M students could gain a global perspective of the world. In the 20 years since it opened, the Center's student programming has grown, and its mission was refined in 2020 to read, "The W&M Washington Center integrates excellent academics and experiential learning to produce high-impact opportunities for all. The Center facilitates meaningful connections and provides a place of belonging for the entire W&M Community" (para. 2). Previously, the Center's mission included only a general goal to "enrich the educational experience for students and help prepare them for the larger world after graduation" (p. 1). The expanded mission statement explicitly focuses on HIPs and includes experiential learning specifically, setting the stage for the DCSI program model.

DCSI began in 2010; as of this writing, no research had been done to determine if the outcomes align with the program's intention to increase students' career readiness. The Center's stakeholders, including alumni who invest their time and money in the program, needed data on what career readiness DCSI students perceive they gain as an outcome of participating. There was no information on what the program had accomplished since its inception. DCSI is a 12-week program that simultaneously delivers three topical institutes over the summer term and allows students to earn academic credit as faculty provide campus-approved curriculum integrated with the university's academic standards and practices. Through this all-inclusive program, students are given the opportunity to live in local W&M-sponsored housing or are free

to find their own D.C. residences or commute from home if that is a geographically reasonable option. Students are also provided with an alumni mentor if they choose and are invited to attend networking events with alumni throughout their time in D.C. Finally, social programming and support services are provided by the W&M Washington Center and available to all DCSI students as needed.

Between 2010–2019, DCSI students earned an average of seven credits throughout the program, but there has been variability over time. All students take a bundle of three courses, which includes a 1-credit preparatory class held in the spring before arriving in D.C. and two 3-credit courses that follow in the summer. The first 3-credit course typically takes place over the last 2 weeks of May and begins the D.C.-based portion of the program; it is an intensive, faculty-led academic course that includes topical speakers and relevant site visits. Instructors engage in a variety of active learning strategies to help students make connections between the theory they read and the practice they see in their off-site visits. The second 3-credit course takes place over the subsequent 10 weeks of the program. Students participate in full-time internships where they bring the initial course theory into action through a practical experience, and faculty ask students to submit assignments that require ongoing reflection, analysis, and synthesis of the experience.

An onsite program coordinator, part of the Washington Center team, works with faculty to recruit and enroll students the fall before their selected program starts and then guides students throughout the spring as they apply for internships. The program coordinator spends significant time working with each student to help them find and prepare suitable applications for quality internship opportunities that directly relate both to the institute topic and the students' interests. Topics of prior institutes have included leadership and community engagement, American politics, and new media. Once students have secured internships, the program coordinator works

with internship supervisors to ensure a quality experience for both student and employer. The process includes a premeeting between program coordinator and supervisor, a mid-summer assessment and meeting, and a final evaluation. The program coordinator stays intimately involved and engaged through the experience. The faculty are responsible for offering reflection assignments throughout the 10-week internship to help students connect the coursework to the related internship. Most faculty include a portfolio of major accomplishments as a final assignment for students to earn their internship credits. The program offers students a deep dive into a potential career field of interest and includes alumni mentors; networking opportunities; and continuous, individualized reflection with faculty and staff. Up to 60 students per year participate in DCSI, with a maximum of 20 in each of the three institutes.

University Context

Chartered in 1693, W&M is considered by many to be a *Public Ivy*, a term used by Moll (1986) to describe institutions that provide students with an Ivy League-caliber education but charge only public school tuition. W&M is the second oldest higher education institution in the United States and has an important place in U.S. history (Thelin, 2011). With just over 6,000 undergraduate students, the main campus is located in Williamsburg, Virginia. The W&M Washington Center is located 150 miles north in the heart of Washington, D.C., home to seven full-time employees who serve about 400 students each year. The Washington Center functions as a small campus in D.C., although it exists in a single suite within a larger, non-W&M office building. In the original location and in a new site, the model of a physical space within a larger institution's building operates the same way. With student housing nearby and local contracts for health care and counseling, students who study in D.C. through the Washington Center have access to many of the same resources as on main campus. The structure for students to study in

D.C. at W&M is similar to that of other institutions with programs operating off the main campus. Dozens of colleges and universities have programs in D.C., and most are organized with the same general, small satellite campus with external providers for amenities such as counseling and health services, local housing, and individualized student support for internships.

For the W&M Washington Center to work effectively, it must be integrated with institutional processes in place on the larger residential campus located in Williamsburg, Virginia. An integrated approach allows students to enroll, earn credit, and make payments seamlessly. Center integrations with the university allow faculty from campus to functionally teach in D.C. and allow staff to market and recruit students through existing structures. Without integrations, the benefit for students to participate in W&M's program (rather than the dozens of other university and private programs) is minimized, and administrative frustrations arise for all involved parties. Although it does generate much of its own revenue to fund more than half of the Center's budget, the university supports basic operations and some personnel costs. Many campus offices (e.g., the registrar and bursar) partner to serve the students of the Washington Center, and they often adjust typical processes to account for operational differences from main campus. Partners such as the Cohen Career Center and University Advancement collaborate with the Washington Center to align best practices for career development and alumni engagement.

The Washington Center seeks faculty from schools and academic departments across the institution to teach the summer institutes, so maintaining relationships with deans and chairs is critical to program success. After 20 years in operation, the Washington Center still must intentionally work to remain relevant and be included in campus thinking and planning. A 2019 Listening Campaign run by the Washington Center team members revealed this relationship-building work has gone well, and awareness on the main campus about the Center has increased.

Steps taken since the campaign have continued to address further campus integrations, communications, and partnership work. Programs such as DCSI tackle all three areas and bring W&M in Williamsburg and D.C. together.

DCSI addresses a need for the university by providing individualized career support and connections, helping students prepare for jobs they want, and getting students off campus. The initial 2001 goal to help students gain a more global perspective of the world happens for many students by nature of living and working in a multicultural and international city such as D.C. but is no longer a primary focus. With W&M's dedicated Reves Center for International Studies guiding the university on international education, DCSI courses provide a domestic alternative for leaving the main campus in Williamsburg, Virginia. Beyond DCSI, the W&M Washington Center supports students who seek high-impact experiential learning opportunities with faculty and staff. By providing student programs that engage alumni via mentors, speakers, and supervisors, the Center also plays a key point of connection to the university for the roughly 20,000 graduates who reside in the D.C. area.

W&M Washington Center

Included in the provost's portfolio, the W&M Washington Center has a small and simple organizational structure (Mintzberg, 1979). A director oversees Center strategy, external relations and fundraising, and innovation. An associate director supervises three program coordinators and ensures all Study in D.C. operations run effectively. The three coordinators each manage the day-to-day operations of their programs, which include: the D.C. Semester Program; D.C. Winter Seminars; D.C. Summer Session; and the program of focus in this study, the D.C. Summer Institutes (DCSI). An administrative and fiscal coordinator manages the business operations of the Center, and an event coordinator plans internal event logistics and

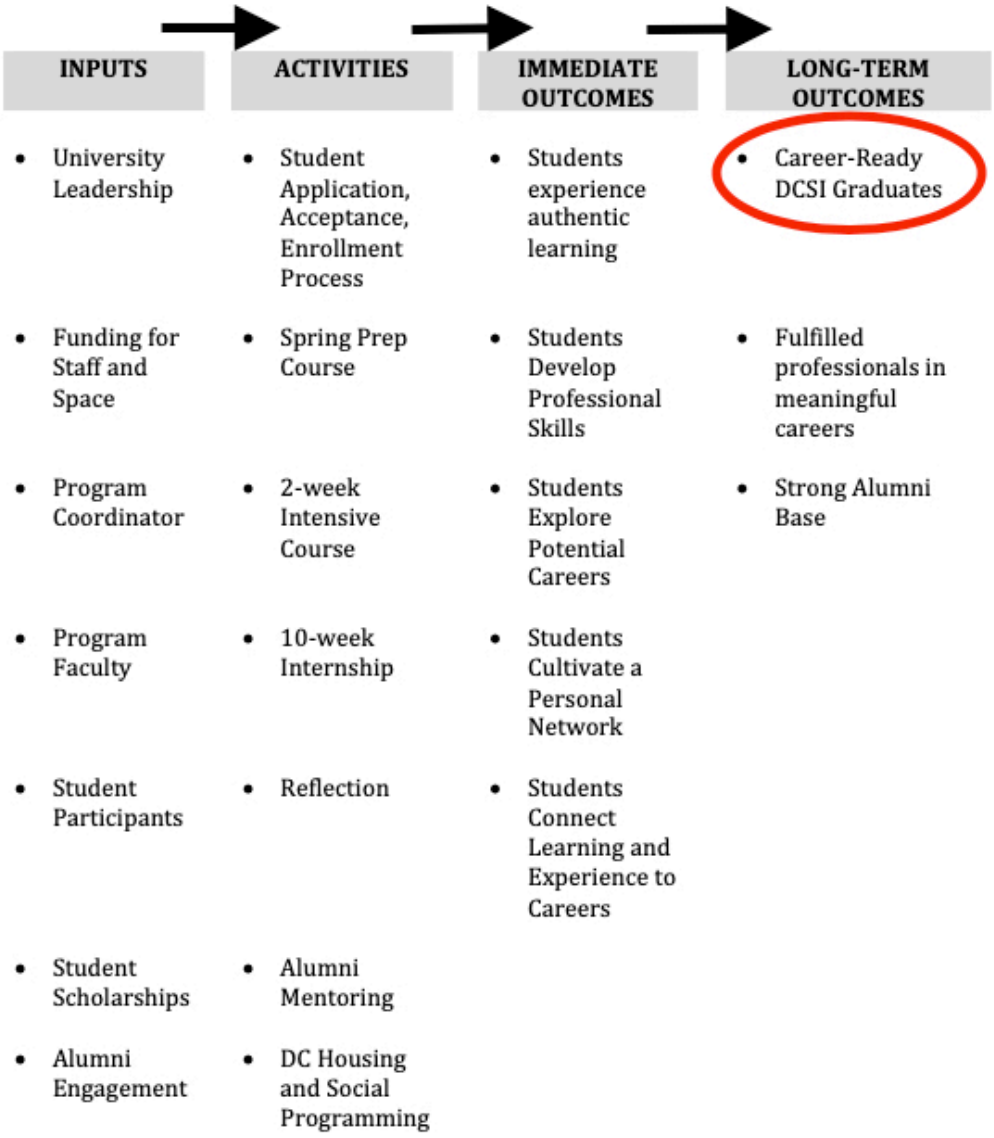
serves the larger W&M community who uses the Center space for events and meetings. Appendix A represents the Center's organizational chart.

Although not originally intended to align with experiential learning theory, DCSI and the D.C. Semester Program are delivered to maximize experiential learning theory in practice. And though the programs were originally designed without a guiding theory and more focused on program logistics, intentional and theory-based design has increasingly driven the Center's model for operations and programming. Each student in both DCSI and the D.C. Semester Program experiences D.C. through internships and related program features. Students are asked to consider and connect their D.C. experiences to their lives and career aspirations and then apply those experiences to their lives beyond W&M. Some of these connections occur through intentional reflective practices built into DCSI academics and programming, and others happen informally in social and residential settings.

The original D.C. Semester Program served as the model for DCSI. The creation of DCSI was inspired by the growing number of students who wanted to participate in the semester program but could not leave campus during the academic year. D.C. Semester Program students have a full 15-week, semester-long internship experience that DCSI cannot replicate given the shorter summer term, but DCSI is still able to offer students an intensive, 10-week internship. The D.C. Semester Program enrolls fewer students each semester, and because each semester is taught by a different faculty member from a different department at W&M, significant variety exists in academic disciplines and related internship sites. DCSI, conversely, has offered a steady return of same or similar topics each year with less variability. DCSI has enrolled more students consistently as well and, thus, was chosen as the program of focus for this study. The logic model in Figure 1 describes the Washington Center's theory of action for DCSI.

Figure 1

D.C. Summer Institutes Logic Model



Inputs reflect the elements that allow DCSI to operate. Senior university leaders approve Center space and operational costs so DCSI can operate programming. The Center's associate director recruits and, with an advisory group, selects faculty to teach in each institute. She trains and prepares faculty and obtains course approvals through university processes. Although the

associate director reports to the Center director, it is the associate director who serves as the primary figure overseeing academic operations. A specific program coordinator reports to the associate director and manages day-to-day tasks associated with DCSI. The Center director simultaneously works with University Advancement to solicit alumni donations, which provide need-based scholarships to students as needed and as available. Alumni often serve as class speakers, mentors, and internships supervisors, further connecting them to the Center and student programming.

Activities address what DCSI students do to apply for program acceptance and what they do while enrolled in the program. The coordinator recruits students, works with the affiliated faculty to interview and accept applicants, and enrolls students in the program. DCSI students then participate in a spring semester preparation course on campus; an intensive 2-week May course in D.C.; and a full-time, 10-week internship that occurs in July and August. Students are supported by mentors and Center staff; they receive D.C. housing and local programming outside of the classroom such as museum trips, sporting events, restaurant gatherings, and concerts. Washington Center staff intentionally work closely with faculty to weave formal and informal reflection opportunities throughout the experience, and faculty are responsible for grading students in each of the three courses, with students earning an average of seven credits. With faculty and staff working in conjunction and closely communicating with students about their experiences, DCSI provides students with personalized support designed to support each individual.

Outcomes are reflected in the final two columns of the model—both in the immediate and longer terms. In the short term, students engage in authentic learning based on course content, develop professional skills, explore careers, cultivate a network, and reflect to make connections

between what they learn and their lives beyond W&M. In the long term, students should be career ready as DCSI graduates and emerging professionals. DCSI participants who gain increased career readiness do so throughout their time at W&M; therefore, DCSI is not the only experience that makes them career ready. However, as circled in red on the logic model (see Figure 1), a career ready DCSI graduate is still the intended product in this program evaluation. The hope is for students to determine what personal fulfillment means to them and find opportunities to be productive employees with the authority and confidence, or agency, to do the work required of them. If students can align their eventual jobs with their established values, a rewarding career may follow. Finally, DCSI students eventually become program alumni, and the hope is many will donate to the scholarship fund for future students and/or volunteer as mentors and speakers for future DCSI classes and become more engaged alumni for the university generally.

Significance of the Study

This program evaluation intended to explore the intrinsic value of the DCSI program for students. In general, it remains unknown how internships benefit students (Hora et al., 2020), and further, internship-based programs are unstudied. An assumption was DCSI helps students develop career ready skills; thus, evaluating this program presented broader implications to inform students, faculty and staff, W&M leaders, and other institutions. Students, for example, may select a university based on the quality of internship programs available. Knowing the intended and likely outcomes of an internship program may convince a student to enroll in one university over another. Students', and even their families', expectations for career readiness upon graduation can be addressed with the results of this program evaluation.

Implications from this study similarly can help W&M faculty and staff to enhance the current DCSI program model. Other institutions' program designers may do the same. This evaluation also presents future implications for university policies and practices around experiential learning writ large. Universities seeking to demonstrate why resources for internship programs are worthwhile can benefit from the study's findings. Higher education leaders looking for ways to increase enrollments may consider advertising internship program outcome statistics to show graduates are career ready.

These findings can also help fill existing literature gaps, particularly for higher education and business sectors, and guide other institutional officials and employers looking to enhance their internship programs. The existing Washington Programs Consortium of D.C.-based internship programs, who gather monthly to share and discuss pertinent issues, could benefit from findings from this study, ultimately applying the findings to their own university offerings.

As noted, access to internship programs is an issue, particularly for low-income students who often cannot afford to participate in an unpaid internship (Hora et al., 2020). Although access is a critically important topic for future study, this study did not address the issue of student access to internship programs; however, some low-income students may have participated in DCSI with scholarship support, and I specifically asked interview participants about their experiences with access. Najmabadi (2017) argued, "Experiential learning helps students succeed, but those who would benefit the most don't often get the chance" (p. A14). Often, internship programs require fees for students to participate, so students without means are left out of potential life- and career-changing opportunities (Kuh, 2008). Although outside the scope of this study, as equity-minded leaders consider how to make internship programs accessible, they must consider barriers to entry (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; McNair et al.,

2020). The benefits of HIPs can be especially powerful for first-generation and other underserved students, but these students are less likely to participate (Kuh, 2008). Excellent programs with intentional design can be powerful for all students, not just those with money (Rutschow & Taketa, 2019). Findings from this study may spur additional underwriting of DCSI program expenses for students with need.

Overview of the Evaluation Approach

Program evaluations intend to investigate the worth and merit of an evaluand (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). To align with my problem of practice—namely, whether internship programs work to support career readiness for students—I designed an outcomes program evaluation (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). With outcomes as the primary focus, I sought to find pragmatic answers to my evaluation questions. In addition, the data collection plan supported the evaluation's focus on the product, or effectiveness, of DCSI.

Purpose of the Evaluation

DCSI, as part of the W&M Washington Center's overall academic offerings, falls within the Center's larger mission, which was initially to prepare students for life after graduation and has evolved more specifically to offer high-impact programs. The principal purpose of this evaluation was to determine explicitly if DCSI increases career readiness for participants and use the findings of the evaluation to improve program operations. This evaluation was summative because the primary purpose was to consider what occurred after the program concluded, serving as a reflection for participants after having completed DCSI. Findings from this evaluation study pose implications for the W&M Washington Center and its stakeholders, the university community, and other experiential learning opportunities in higher education and beyond. As referenced, the implications of this study can inform prospective university students, internship

program faculty and staff, and broader institutional personnel looking to enhance and advertise their internship program offerings.

Focus of the Evaluation

The focus of this evaluation was to learn from DCSI alumni the ways their participation in this internship program helped them become career ready, if at all. By considering program outcomes, I evaluated the effectiveness of DCSI practices and determined if the outcomes aligned with intentions. Notably, some alumni in this study had been in their careers longer than others; thus, differences in alumni perspectives attributed to time, because graduation was noted.

Evaluation Questions

This study investigated the following broad evaluation question related to DCSI alumni specifically from 2010–2019:

1. How are DCSI alumni reporting their participation in the W&M Washington Center's internship-based program helped them achieve career readiness?

The question was intentionally general because of the range in DCSI graduation years as noted previously, but the interview protocol reflected a variance between graduates' readiness for first jobs and longer careers. Specifically, I sought to explore how DCSI alumni reported the following four program elements helped them achieve career readiness:

1. How does the internship help the DCSI alumni achieve career readiness?
2. How does the faculty-led academic connection help the DCSI alumni achieve career readiness?
3. How does the alumni relationship building and professional networking help the DCSI alumni achieve career readiness?

4. How does the regularly guided reflection help the DCSI alumni achieve career readiness?

Chapter Summary

Experiential learning, and internship-based programs in higher education specifically, are increasingly important offerings for students looking to graduate career ready (Hora et al., 2020). Through a program evaluation of W&M's internship-based program, DCSI, I explored how alumni reported their participation helped them achieve career readiness and how four specific elements (i.e., the internship itself, academic coursework, networking opportunities, and reflection) contributed to that readiness. Chapter 2 provides a review of theory, history, and existing literature around experiential learning and internships, and Chapter 3 offers an account of the research methods. Next, Chapter 4 presents my quantitative and qualitative findings. Finally, Chapter 5 offers implications for policy and practice and future recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A significant body of research has described experiential learning and the potential benefits it holds for students. My problem of practice was informed by gaps in existing literature on whether internship programs in higher education work. Do students gain increased career readiness after participating in an internship program? Which specific program elements help students achieve career readiness? To begin exploring these questions, the first section of the literature review offers a broad overview of experiential learning pedagogy and practice. The second section includes an exploration of experiential learning and internship best practices for student learning, and the third section briefly outlines the relationship between the main campus and a satellite site, where internship programs are likely to occur. The final section examines how experiential learning, and internship programs specifically, impact students and address equity concerns.

Experiential Learning Pedagogy

Spanning more than a century of discourse, experiential learning is a form of education that connects experience to learning. Experiential learning asks students to do something (e.g., in an internship, on a site visit, via lab research) and then reflect and make connections to learn from the experience. Experiential learning is about connecting the theory and the practical, hands-on experience. As a result, learning is deepened and enhanced. In the following historical overview of experiential learning theory, a variety of theories and practices are presented to offer a sense of the landscape and scope of this form of learning over time.

Experiential Learning History

Dewey (1916) was the first researcher to bring experiential education to the stage. He believed education must be based on experience and argued becoming an educated citizen depends on such experience. Dewey also shared it is by reflecting on an experience, instead of just doing it, that students can learn something more about themselves. He felt people are connected to their experiences (Dewey, 1916). Dewey's early ideas set the foundation for a more active form of learning. His seminal work on how people learn (Dewey, 1938) informed educators that "experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other . . . [and] . . . everything depends on the *quality* of the experience which is had" (pp. 13, 16, emphasis in original). Dewey established the innovative idea that although experience is critical to education, not all experiences are equally valuable to the learner.

Decades later, D. A. Kolb (1984) expanded on Dewey's (1916, 1938) earlier work. D. A. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory shaped much of the pedagogy used in the 21st century and is still often referenced in modern conferences and lectures. He characterized learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (D. A. Kolb, 1984, p. 38). His four-stage learning cycle included "concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation" (D. A. Kolb, 1984, p. 40). D. A. Kolb suggested when students move through the cycles, they transform.

More recently, the concepts of Dewey (1916, 1938) and D. A. Kolb (1984) have increasingly made their way into educational settings from K–12 through college. Pointedly:

> Over the past decade, institutions of higher education (IHE) have incorporated experiential learning courses in liberal arts curricula as a way to help students learn the course concepts, understand the conditions that lead to racial and economic disparities in

> the community, and develop into socially responsible citizens. (Simons et al., 2012, p. 325)

With the potential for such powerful outcomes, experiential learning practices have been seldom criticized, yet implementation has remained variable. Applying consistent criteria and measuring regular outcomes has yet to be standardized.

In higher education, a lack of standardization of experiential learning in college settings exists, yet "evidence supports the relationship between active and experiential learning opportunities and improved student outcomes, including student engagement, course grades, credential completion, and labor market placement, both in the community college context and more broadly across postsecondary sectors" (Barnett & Kopko, 2020, p. 12). Institutional personnel may be forced to consider career-related outcomes with new attention. New gainful employment regulations from the U.S. Department of Education could force colleges to analyze students' postgraduation incomes compared to loan debt, and federal funding could be at stake for for-profit colleges whose graduates do not earn enough (Kelderman, 2022). Murakami (2020) shared many institutions would not pass this test at present. Looking into the next decade, as the public demands more transparency about their graduates' levels of career readiness, experiential learning—and internship programs in particular—are likely to be elevated in demand, accessibility, and promotional language. How institutions implement such programs is the next area of exploration.

Implementation and Developments

The idea that experiential learning can transform individuals emerged from early theorists such as Dewey (1916) and has continued to guide program development. One longstanding example of experiential learning is study abroad programs. Even though study abroad programs

were beyond the purview of this study, they are similarly off-campus, as are many internship programs. Researchers have documented that students often come back transformed after studying abroad (e.g., Anand et al., 2020), but less is known about how internship program experiences influence participating students.

As Toner (2019) noted, "Employers value the general competencies students obtain through study abroad, but, increasingly, the emphasis is on narrower skills that are often learned through specific, career-focused study experiences" (p. 26). Internships remain marketed as a vehicle to learn skills that apply in the workplace. Internship programs often take students off campus, albeit in different ways and with different focuses from study abroad, and espouse students will gain hands-on experience and obtain new perspectives in a workplace setting. Adding in internship program elements (e.g., academics, alumni networks, and reflection) allows students the means to connect theory to practice and improve their career readiness, because these added elements help students integrate their learning—leading to greater success in college and life (Barber, 2020).

The purposeful integration of academics and non-classroom learning is uncommon in higher education. As Barber (2014) noted:

> Rarely are students encouraged to link classroom learning to their experiences outside of the classroom in jobs and internships, relationships, student organizations, or athletic teams. Faculty members should be intentional and explicit about opening the door to broader integration for students and inviting students' learning from other contexts into the classroom because research has shown the benefits of building on prior knowledge for learners. (p. 12)

Although some faculty implement an integrated approach, there is no expectation for faculty to employ this tactic; however, students increasingly look for more than a classroom lecture, and they require skill development beyond the memorization of facts to use critical thinking in actual application (Toner, 2019).

Students look for a return on their investment in the form of career readiness, and they may select their college with internship programs in mind. Similarly, "one of the primary goals of higher education is to prepare students to become contributing members of society, in particular the workforce, upon graduation. Therefore, a major claim of success for an institution involves the employment of its graduates" (Miller et al., 2018, p. 490). Beyond ratings of success, colleges and universities will be expected, if not obliged, to track and share employment information on their graduates if they plan to enroll new students in the coming years.

Students now are "a multi-modal generation and therefore demand pedagogical practices that engage multiple channels of learning and on ways of assessing the learning outcomes. This generation of students feels a responsibility to take action in solving real societal problems" (Ortega-Dela Cruz, 2020, p. 14). They flourish when engaged in experiential learning opportunities, and as they search for a sense of purpose, building an intentional university learning setting can help them find it. In the purposeful higher education environment, faculty and administrators integrate practices to allow for student engagement in their own learning. Internship programs are one example of an integrated approach that may enhance learning, but other experiential and engaged learning opportunities can do the same. According to National Survey of Student Engagement (2006):

> For years, researchers have pointed to involvement in educationally purposeful activities as the gateway to desired outcomes of college. Students who engage more frequently in

> educationally effective practices get better grades, are more satisfied, and are more likely to persist. Recent findings from independent studies have corroborated the relationships between engagement and indicators of student success in college such as grades and persistence with undergraduates in different types of institutional settings. (p. 9)

Students and employers may increasingly define college success in terms of career readiness (Rosenbaum, 2002; Zimmerman, 2019), but misalignment exists between what is taught and what is needed in the workplace (Savitz-Romer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2020). Colleges must do more keep up with career readiness expectations if they are to survive. The implementation of powerful experiential learning opportunities, or high-impact practices (HIPs), is a minimum requirement today. According to Kinzie (2012), "Opportunities like first-year seminars, study abroad, and internships have become more available across a range of bachelor's granting institutions, both public and private, from large research institutions to small private liberal arts colleges" (p. 1). It is no longer an option to omit HIPs from the curricula nor will it be acceptable to simply place students in just any internship. A quality, integrated experience with reflection is what makes it powerful for students.

Merely implementing HIPs is not enough; these practices must be assessed to determine if they influence career readiness. Research suggests they do. For example, Miller et al. (2018) discussed the positive outcomes of HIPs for students based on their study, which considered the relationship between HIPs and career outcomes. Their findings showed a positive relationship between HIPs and careers, which is:

> Promising for institutions seeking to show evidence of their effectiveness, particularly as it relates to the offering of HIPs for students. These associations between HIPs and positive career-related outcomes can help to justify devoting financial and personnel

> resources to ensure that all students have options for HIP participation. In addition, these findings add nuance to the relationships between particular HIPs and students' career and educational aspirations. If students participate in certain HIPs, such as internships, senior capstones, and service learning, our data show that this is positively related to job attainment prior to graduation…Furthermore, these findings provide local, state, and national policymakers some evidence of the potential impact that HIPs have on graduates' transition to work. (Miller et al., 2008, p. 504)

With career readiness as a focus and internship programs as a prime example of what an experiential learning HIP can look like in practice, institutional personnel have the framework to implement learning practices that contribute to career readiness for students and act to intentionally design quality programs. Doing so will not only benefit students but potentially university enrollments as well.

Experiential Learning Best Practices

As institutions design and run a variety of experiential learning opportunities for students, there are an array of models with which programs might align. Although more studies are needed to determine which program elements are most impactful for student learning, a set of best practices for student learning has actively been developed (Jackson, 2015). Similarly, when specifically considering an internship program—one example of experiential learning—there are similarities among ones considered high impact. The effectiveness of any one internship program is determined by participants and their individual career needs, learning expectations, and goals; however, across all forms of HIPs, there are similarities and essential standards to enhance student learning, as discussed in this section.

Discussions of experiential learning have often considered best practices for classroom implementation as well. According to Hora et al. (2020), "At a time when colleges and universities are anxious to prove that their graduates are employable, internships are being increasingly touted as valuable 'high-impact' practices" (p. 1). However, not all experiences qualify as experiential learning and not all experiential learning is high impact, so it is worth identifying effective internship program practices. Case in point, Hora et al. (2020) noted:

> The assumption that an internship is by default a form of experiential learning is flawed, as a rich and engaging learning experience – whether in the classroom or the internship placement site – is difficult to design and enact, and is simply not synonymous with any particular site or venue of learning. Even advocates of internships as a high-impact practice recognize that much depends on how individual institutions and advisors structure and support students in their internships. (p. 15)

Hora et al. (2020) went on to suggest students should be involved in the internship design process, appropriate levels of faculty and staff should be dedicated to the program, and there are no best practices that apply to all students. Each student and learning situation is unique, so working with students individually is the first best practice. Although individualized attention is not always practical nor scalable, given the personal nature of an internship experience in any number of career fields, bringing in topical experts and mentors may also be a useful tool to help students get the industry-specific focus they require. University career centers can also help by generally preparing students and advising students individually. Career centers could become critical partners for many internship programs.

Making the proper level of connections among learning, internships, and the career paths that follow is another important element in program design. Toner (2019) discussed the common

partnership between career centers and study abroad offices as an example to bridge these elements, reporting:

> "A lot of our career counselors work one-to-one [with students]," says Becky Hall, UMN's director of career services administration. "In most of these conversations, they're talking with students about the transferability of skills [learned abroad] and how they're applying them to the application and interview process." Creating effective partnerships, however, requires intentional work. "It's easily taken for granted, but we don't," says Hall. (p. 27)

Working with intention to help students connect their learning—in this case, learning acquired in study abroad—with transferrable career skills requires actions versus hoping for happenstance connections. Partnerships beyond career centers are another common practice seen in experiential learning at the university level. Among administrative units (e.g., registrar, bursar, academic departments, employer partners), having counterparts with whom to connect in a variety of areas increases the integrated approach and subsequent value of a program (Barber, 2020). As described in the overview, the broader topic of campus–satellite relationships is addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

Although researchers have begun to connect experiential learning (e.g., study abroad) to career trajectories, there remain gaps in research on internships and career outcomes. Fedesco et al. (2020) suggested, "Field-based learning in higher education is lacking both in practice at colleges and in research within the academic literature" (p. 65). This program evaluation intended to bridge this gap in literature and provide data on the outcomes of one such internship program. It remained unknown if internships align with the outcomes of study abroad found in prior research on that particular HIP.

Internship Best Practices

There is a lack of substantial research in moving from a general experiential learning theory to more specific internship program practice. Most existing literature focused on internships concentrated on standalone experiences, which differ from an integrated approach, may vary greatly in terms of quality, and are less likely to be high impact without intentional reflection. Although some outcomes are known about internships, even less has been identified about programs that integrate and scaffold the experience. Because there is little on the more inclusive and all-encompassing internship program, I used internships as a substitute in this section. Still, no common standards exist for internship practices. Higher education professionals know "workplace learning programmes, such as internships, provide students opportunities to engage in authentic workplace practices in ways that typically do not occur in a classroom environment" (Zehr & Korte, 2020, p. 312). However, professionals in higher education do not know what specifically must happen in an internship program to take the experience and turn it into a meaningful and career-developing one that is impactful in student learning.

Certainly, students participate in internships on their own, outside of any program or university affiliation and without an affiliated academic curriculum, but these internships may offer little value beyond a few basic workplace skills. An integrated program may help students make larger connections and therefore develop potentially more valuable skills. Miller et al. (2018) expanded on prior research to affirm the argument that "completing an internship provides students with practical applications and real-world experiences and also has been shown to increase students' leadership skills, professional development, and intercultural effectiveness" (p. 490). With thousands of institutions across the United States considering or already offering internship programs, some common best practices have begun to emerge.

First, internship programs must support students in their learning processes and help them reflect to make connections (Barber, 2020). They cannot simply provide a drop-off situation in which faculty and staff leave the student intern to process and reflect on the internship experience on their own. Quality programs must provide connection points, guidance, and support, as described by Zehr and Korte (2020) when referencing Korte's (2009) earlier work:

> One of the main objectives of…internships is to provide students with learning experiences that prepare them for jobs. In order for internships to work effectively…it is critical to provide systematic guidance for learning (e.g., mentoring and meaningful work) and to effectively integrate interns. (p. 320)

Structures and staff should be in place to ensure students receive the encouragement they need to work through challenges and learn as much as possible.

Also referenced previously is the idea of meaningful work, another important element in quality internship programs. Although making copies may allow interns to develop a specific, albeit basic, skill, the overall experience should allow students to learn relevant professional skills at a deeper level. According to Urquía-Grande and Pérez Estébanez (2021), "Internships should provide a unique opportunity for students to apply cognitive, transversal and social skills learnt at the university and develop themselves as future professionals" (p. 492). Moving to more complex levels of learning (Bloom, 1964) provides students with a means to integrate a range of experiences in an internship (Barber, 2020).

Next is the idea that a quality internship program allows students to make connections between their immediate, practical experiences and their learning. Zehr and Korte (2020) suggested, "Students also need to recognise connections between what they learn in the classroom and the workplace so that they effectively apply knowledge in one environment to the

other" (p. 320). By applying this knowledge, students integrate their learning more deeply (Barber, 2020). Some of this integration may happen organically, but intentionally designing a program that integrates learning and give students a variety of ways to connect, apply, and synthesize classroom and internship learning to their lives and careers can be powerful (Barber, 2020). Zehr and Korte (2020) went on to explain how institutions can play a role in helping students with these connections:

> One potential solution could be to provide a preinternship course or programme that teaches students to regularly reflect on their experiences and what they have learned and to consider how what they do in the workplace relates to what they have learned in school. Instructing students about the importance of workplace relationships and facilitating their integration into the social networks of the organization would increase the likelihood that they will gain valuable experience and learning from their internship. This can be challenging given that students and organizations vary widely. (pp. 320–321)

Intentional reflection, networking, and practical skill development, as described in this study, are part of some integrated internship programs, including DCSI, and may help students integrate and make meaning from the experience, thereby maximizing student learning.

A critical goal of higher education is to develop and support lifelong learning. Employers often want their new employees to learn and develop, and this learning is embedded in social, interactional environments (Billett, 2009). One way higher education institutions can place more emphasis on the social and interpersonal nature of both scholarship and practice is by providing courses for interns that focus on the internship experience. These courses can provide opportunities for intentional connection for students to reflect on their learning. Other opportunities to develop social and interpersonal skills in an internship program might include

faculty and staff working directly with internship supervisors to integrate the internship experience with classroom learning before, during, or after the work experience, and to touch base on the intern's progress at regular intervals.

Although internship program models vary from institution to institution, many seem to offer some level of academic credit for the internship itself or for the written work (e.g., reflections, journals, papers, portfolios), associated with the internship. For example, DCSI at W&M includes a 1-credit spring preparation course, a 3-credit topical theory course, and a 3-credit internship course where students are asked to write journals, papers, and prepare portfolios about their internship experience. Faculty or staff connections to the internship institutions are a critical component in embedding the experience into curriculum.

Reflection is critical to the integration of learning (Barber, 2020). Through such reflection, students can make meaningful connections. D. A. Kolb's (1984) learning cycle focused on reflection, as did his and others' more recent literature on internship programs (Anand et al., 2020; A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Lambert Snodgrass et al., 2021). Reflection is the glue holding together an internship program and helping students make as much meaning as possible from the experience. As Barber (2020) described:

> Hands-on experiences are exciting learning opportunities because they're action-packed. Students are living in diverse cultures, building new structures, and working in communities. Students are immersed in the experience, and they are learning by doing. It can be difficult to pause the action in hands-on experiences to take time to reflect and make meaning of what is being learned. Often, reflection is missed altogether because students (and faculty/staff) are tired after an intense hands-on experience. However, I

> argue that the quiet space of reflection is a necessary companion to the motion of hands-on experiences. (p. 95)

Embedding reflective practice into internship experiences is a critical practice element. Internship program models vary, but as more research is conducted, clearer best practices may emerge. In the meantime, the aforementioned elements—including support, quality, integration, and reflection—serve as a foundation for success.

Main Campus and Satellite Relationships

As it relates to the functional model for internship programs, a plethora of structural designs allow individuals, organizations, and higher education institutions to create internship experiences. Many interns participate in internships they find on their own without any collegiate connection, and many employers often design internships and hire students without any connection to the student's university (Michigan State University & Collegiate Employment Research Institute, 2016). Yet, a more connected approach allows students to intern at an organization in connection with their university with a more integrated model. This integrated approach must be considered in detail, as it served as the setting of my research. In the case of off-campus internship programs, as is the scenario for this evaluation study, a satellite location, apart from campus, exists specifically to manage the program. Increasingly, such locations are being established in Washington, D.C. (Anderson, 2019). Although this model is limited in location focus and has not been studied, the relationship between a main campus and a satellite location more generally offers a template to investigate logistic operations.

Satellite campuses are commonly seen in large universities and community college settings. Management, operations, and leadership in satellite locations are often influenced (positively or negatively) by communication. A lack of communication is a noted challenge for

many satellites (Hermanson, 1995). The same holds true of a D.C. office satellite given its need to connect to the business side of the main campus to tackle course creation, billing, registration, and other logistics. However, there are often significant variances in day-to-day operations between the main campus and a satellite. Being integrated yet having freedom along with clear communication channels will help a satellite office achieve maximum functional success. This relationship between the main campus and a satellite is an example of the loosely coupled system (Weick, 1976) that is higher education. Instead of being so intertwined that the two different campuses are dependent on each other, a loosely coupled system allows for some degree of independence and permits the satellite to do things differently despite still being related. For a satellite, partnering with units from the main campus streamlines operations and maintains enough of a relationship that the system can function without mimicking processes exactly.

According to Poling et al. (2009), "Regional campuses are common in the landscape of higher education and are projected to grow as they serve expanding nontraditional student populations" (p. 194). Regional in this context refers to a non-flagship campus or a comprehensive college, which are open access and like community colleges (Crisp et al., 2021), both of which are similar to the satellite campus. With growth on the horizon, it is important to note unique challenges exist, and most stem from communication issues and a lack of clarity around mission and roles (Poling et al., 2009). Satellites may also be established abroad, making them unique in almost all operations and full of operational challenges, and communication with main campus remains key to success here as well (Dessoff, 2011).

Varying levels of success with satellite campuses may have to do with degrees of autonomy and independence between the main campus and its satellite (Fraser & Stott, 2015). Management structures and business process are an example of places where connections must

exist, but needs and practices may vary, which may cause tension. Fraser and Stott (2015) described satellite business as:

> Probably the most important area of autonomy relates to the satellite campus business. This means the extent to which the campus head can make decisions about the programs to be offered, how they will be delivered, the costs involved, and quality monitoring. (p. 81)

For satellite offices such as those that offer internship programs in Washington, D.C. or elsewhere, flexibility and freedom are important. Leaders in a satellite office report to the leaders of the larger institution on the main campus but are tasked with making decisions at a high level with some degree of autonomy. Satellite leaders likely know the nuances of their location better than a university-wide leader on the main campus and are, therefore, better equipped to run operations and lead the team. Satellite leaders, however, undoubtedly need the support of campus leaders and ultimately must be responsible to that institution at large. Finding the right balance between integration and autonomy can allow a satellite unit to flourish, one of the benefits of a loosely coupled system, whereas forcing a satellite to operate like the main campus when its needs are quite different can hinder operations and impact program quality.

Student Impact

The impact of experiential learning and internship programs on students is positive (Fedesco et al., 2020; Villarroel et al., 2020). Literature has not shown any negative effects, rather the opposite. Students benefit from learning by doing and making connections between classroom theory and practical experience, which then can connect to their careers and lives beyond college (Barber, 2020). This section explores the exact impacts on students, first with experiential learning more generally and then with internship programs more specifically.

Impact of Experiential Learning on Students

The specific outcomes and student learning that occur as a result of experiential learning have been studied more in the K–12 setting than in higher education. At universities, though, "educators who have incorporated field trips into their higher education courses have discovered that these experiences are just as beneficial to their students as they are for K–12 learners" **(**Fedesco et al., 2020, p. 66). Students report positive attitudes, a better understanding of the material, and beneficial learning experiences as the result of field trips alone (Fedesco et al., 2020).

Villarroel et al. (2020) used experiential learning techniques and collected data on what happened, which showed participants perceived the learning positively:

> Specifically, they valued the opportunity to apply their knowledge, learn in greater depth, remembering it better, as well as being able to make a concrete contribution, from the discipline, to solve a real problem…They also valued the ability of students to synthesize the experience in a specific product that would allow solving the problem encountered. (p. 11)

The impacts of experiential learning are often described anecdotally and involve students feeling a clearer connection to what they learn and their future job plans. It is important to conduct more research on experiential learning outcomes, as done in my study. Ambrose and Poklop (2015) noted the longstanding and high-impact co-op program at Northeastern University "extends the curriculum by showing students the value and relevance of knowledge and skills gained in coursework (knowledge in action) and providing opportunities for the integration and use of knowledge and skills in new and real-world contexts (transfer)" (p. 56). Experiential

learning helps students makes connections because it intentionally integrates their learning, resulting in positive outcomes for personal and career-related learning.

In addition to helping students make connections, the positive impacts of experiential learning can include postgraduation career readiness. Toner (2019) described how integrating experiential learning into the academic curriculum can influence applicable professional skills in the following way:

> Students—and the employers who hire them after graduation—are increasingly seeking programs abroad that are relevant to their personal and professional goals. Accordingly, colleges and universities are continuing efforts to integrate study abroad with academic requirements, career services, and, ultimately, the real-world experiences and skills that help justify the return on investment. (p. 27)

Career readiness as a result of experiential learning is not just about workplace skills but also about students' ability to think critically, problem solve, and consider new perspectives. In fact, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2019) competencies reflect both critical thinking and problem solving as well as intercultural fluency, which includes one's respect for and appreciation of global viewpoints. Toner (2019) added the real benefit of study abroad programs, for example, is helping students meet personal and professional goals. The same is true for experiential learning in internship programs.

Impact of Internships on Students

Participating in internship programs as a particular example of experiential learning is a common way students spend a summer or semester during college. Although limited literature exists on the impact of such programs, Hora et al. (2020) argued, "Research on internships is increasing across disciplinary and national boundaries, as more governments and postsecondary

institutions advocate for their inclusion in students' educational programs" (p. 2) because institutions want to prove their students graduate career ready. If it is generally believed internship programs increase students' career readiness so more programs can develop, data must be gathered on the efficacy of such programs. Internship programs can offer students a return on their college investment and play a key role in preparing students for their careers. These programs "can be an effective way to help students learn about a target occupation, develop the skills that are important to prospective employers, and provide opportunities for employer-student engagement" (Barnett & Kopko, 2020, p. 13). The intention of this evaluation study was to understand how participants in DCSI viewed their program experiences relative to their career readiness.

The potential for a significant, positive impact of internship programs on students is great, particularly related to career readiness. According to Callanan and Benzing (2004):

> Internships and related programs have proven to be an invaluable career management tool for college students in the development of a clear self-identity and in the setting of career goals. Further, as this research shows, internships have practical worth since they provide an advantage in securing career-oriented employment at the time of graduation. (p. 87)

Callanan and Benzing (2004) believed higher education should "wholeheartedly support internship and cooperative education programs" (p. 87), and internships are critical in career development. Beyond individual benefits for students participating in internships are potential benefits for society. The effect on students—and student success, as Kinzie and Kuh (2017) described it—can deliver on the promise of all that higher education claims it can achieve in graduating informed citizens who contribute positively to democracy. Particularly, Kinzie and Kuh (2017) noted access to career pathways is enhanced through offerings such as university

internship programs. Society benefits when a trained workforce graduates but is enhanced when those individuals demonstrate the NACE (2019) competencies, including teamwork, leadership, and global fluency.

Furthermore, "existing studies have evidenced that internships can help students develop relevant professional skills and soft skills, connect with professionals, acclimate to the world of work, and increase employment competitiveness" (Nghia & Duyen, 2019, p. 2). Soft skills are an important part of career readiness and reflect to an employer that an applicant is ready to handle the responsibilities associated with the position. Past internship experiences—in particular, those integrated into academics through reflection—can allow students to achieve success in their careers and in career transitions (Miller et al., 2018). As Miller et al. (2018) explained:

> Participation in an internship increases the likelihood that a student will have plans to start a new job after graduation more than any other HIP and more than most of the control variables in the models…Internships give students real-life experiences in their field, which increase their marketable skills and the stature of their résumé. Internships also provide students with direct connections in their field and opportunities for networking. Internship proponents emphasize the substantial importance of such experiences. (p. 500)

As described, networking experience is another positive impact that is often the direct result of internship programs.

Networking is an important point worth noting, as many students worry about how to network. When viewed simply as relationship building, especially in one's field, it becomes clear working in an internship setting and meeting the practitioners doing the work is valuable for creating a network. Simons et al. (2012) found internship program students gained increased

understanding of content and enhanced their abilities to contribute to their community. The community referenced here comprised the community of one's industry or field. Being in the community to learn and develop relationships is a significant outcome and has a positive impact on student participants.

Considerations of Equity

Access to internship programs remains problematic. For a variety of reasons, including financial limitations, internship programs do not provide equitable access to all students. Barnett and Kopko (2020), drawing on the work of Cantor (1995), stated, "Importantly, minority students who traditionally have not had access to such programs, as well as those students aspiring to enter nontraditional occupations may benefit the most from such experiences" (p. 13). Although financial aid may help increase access, opportunity costs to the student due to time constraints and the ability to work paid positions often render unpaid internships a nonviable option. Knowing the value of internship programs, though, "disparities in participation are reason for concern. Interest in making HIPs [like internship programs] more widespread has motivated some institutions to examine access and implement initiatives to increase participation" (Kinzie, 2012, p. 2). The increased focus on internship programs in university settings will require—in addition to standards of practice—a close look at access.

Hudson and Klein-Collins (2018) considered equity in access and the need to solve the problem of student availability, stating:

> Students who work full time (both adults and younger students) may not be good candidates for traditional internship opportunities. Reforms of career services that emphasize the importance of experiential learning are welcome ones, but they won't benefit the working adult student if experiential learning is available primarily through

> internships. Many adult students enrolling in college are already working full time and cannot afford to cut back their hours or quit their jobs to take advantage of internship opportunities. Other strategies for incorporating experiential and work-based learning are critical for serving this population. (p. 5)

Creative solutions may have continued to emerge, but they need to develop faster as the gap in access grows. This issue of access is less relevant for DCSI, given most W&M students—and therefore DCSI participants—are of traditional college age. The DCSI program could consider more accessible practices for those students who work full-time already.

The responsibility to increase access and better align internship programs equitably may not depend solely on higher education institutions. Miller et al. (2018) shared:

> Internships might ease the transition for college graduates into the workforce. Students cannot always afford to do internships because many of them are unpaid. Thus, policymakers might consider setting aside funding for students with unpaid internships to offset their living expenses while participating in these internships. Policy officials might also consider granting money to support programs at the institutional level (such as those mentioned previously) that place students in both unpaid and paid internships. Finally, public programs to support companies to offer paid internships to college students in the local, state, or national community could create opportunities for college students to participate in these internships that may simplify their transition to the workforce. (p. 501)

In the meantime, access to internship programs remains inequitable and in sharp contrast to university values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Summary

Although experiential learning methods, practices, and challenges seemed to have been explored in various ways, less information exists on the outcomes of internship programs in higher education. As leaders consider what their institutional operations will entail following the COVID-19 global pandemic and demand for quality internships rises, research on what works in HIPs, such as W&M's DCSI, could offer valuable data for faculty, administrators, and students. As Hora et al. (2020) described:

> Future research should investigate student conceptions of internships among a larger sample of students, particularly across a variety of disciplines, countries, and institution types, and also how engaging students more substantively in internship design may function in practice. Contrary to the not uncommon perception that internships provide uniformly positive experiences and outcomes to students—who ostensibly have the same goals and understandings of internships—our data demonstrate that in fact considerable variation exists in how students perceive these programs. Along with the need to democratize the dominant discourse around employability and internships, our findings indicate that how higher education professionals, policymakers, and workforce educators discuss internships should become more attentive to student voice, experience and needs. (p. 17)

Chapter 3 focuses on a program evaluation model that began to address this question of student perceptions. This program evaluation specifically considered career readiness for students after participating in W&M's DCSI program.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This chapter presents the research design of the D.C. Summer Institutes (DCSI) program evaluation that served as the focus of this dissertation. In this chapter, I address this study's paradigm, research framework, participant pool, data collection, and analysis. Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion of assumptions, delimitations, limitations, ethical considerations, and project timeline. The evaluation used electronic quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews for data generation and integrated mixed methods with coding for data analysis (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). This approach allowed for an investigation into how DCSI alumni reported their participation in the internship-based program helped them achieve career readiness.

Evaluation Questions

This study investigated the following question for DCSI alumni between 2010–2019:

How are DCSI alumni reporting their participation in the internship-based program helped them achieve career readiness?

Specifically, the study evaluated how DCSI alumni reported the following four program elements helped them achieve career readiness:

1. How does the internship help them achieve career readiness?
2. How does the faculty-led academic connection help them achieve career readiness?

3. How does the alumni relationship building and professional networking help them achieve career readiness?
4. How does the regularly guided reflection help them achieve career readiness?

A crosswalk table shows the alignment of the evaluation questions with survey and interview items (see Appendix B).

Program Evaluation Approach and Description

Inspired by the pragmatic paradigm, the program evaluation focused on outcomes for students who participated in the DCSI program at the William & Mary (W&M) Washington Center between 2010–2019. I used an outcome program evaluation (Mertens & Wilson, 2019) because I sought to determine if DCSI outcomes aligned with program intentions. Mertens and Wilson (2019) explained, "Outcome/impact evaluations can be useful for demonstrating that a project is or is not achieving its goals" (p. 265). Similarly, the data collection plan focused on the effectiveness of DCSI. A pragmatic approach "focuses primarily on data that are found to be useful for stakeholders [and] advocates for the use of mixed methods" (Mertens & Wilson, 2019, p. 42). Thus, this study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection. An outcome evaluation allowed me to measure the results of DCSI rather than the inputs and attempt to determine what actually occurred for students as a result of participating in DCSI (Stufflebeam, 2001). Furthermore, I was, as described by Herman (2005), "Concerned with assessing program impact—whether or to what extent a program has produced the desired outcomes…The goal of any outcome evaluation design is to demonstrate causality—whether a program has caused the desired changes" (p. 407). The alignment of DCSI program outcomes for alumni relative to program intentions was precisely what I sought to evaluate.

DCSI stakeholders included W&M leaders, the team of the Washington Center, alumni, donors, students (and some families), and faculty. To address the stakeholders' needs, an outcome program evaluation allowed me to offer qualitative and quantitative data on the effectiveness of DCSI. I used a summative evaluation to consider what occurred after the program concluded, rather than using a formative evaluation to assess what happened along the way. Program evaluation begins by identifying what is being evaluated and then moves to why the evaluation is needed. Stakeholders can help identify the purpose of a program and then an evaluation is designed to assess accordingly; the results can support decision making on program adjustments (Mertens & Wilson, 2019).

Given my intimate role in W&M Washington Center programs and relationships with past students, I attempted to reduce researcher bias to the extent possible by including member checks as noted. I maintained a researcher's journal to reflect on my practices to ensure consistency and check my bias. To best control for extraneous variables and offer a high degree of internal validity, the outcome evaluation for DCSI looked only at the first 10 years of the program (i.e., 2010–2019), which I intentionally selected to include a context prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic. This evaluation was summative, in it offered an evaluation of long-term outcomes and produced a report on alumni perceptions of the ways the program provided them with career readiness. The study included a self-created survey sent to all 449 DCSI program students who participated during the 10-year span and optional interviews for 30 participants who chose to partake. There was intentionality in the selection of the 30 individuals selected for the qualitative interviews to assure stratification based on specific summer institute, graduation year, gender, race, major, and year of participation in DCSI. Once the interviews were conducted, I notified those not selected. Novel survey data along with coded interview

transcripts provided the data to inform the evaluation of DCSI. Program evaluation accuracy standards guided sound design techniques and consistent documentation (Yarbrough et al., 2011), including transcriptions and reports. Regular member checking helped address researcher bias.

Role of the Researcher

To mitigate researcher bias, the program evaluation process included member checks at scheduled intervals throughout the design phase (i.e., using an expert panel review and pilot interview), the administration and collection phase, and the analysis phase. I recognized my own researcher bias and used a peer reviewer to further guard against bias. I selected a peer reviewer who was a colleague at W&M and who was familiar with DCSI but was not at all connected to the program operations. She was a classmate in my doctoral program and a valued leader at the university who graciously agreed to serve in this capacity. I conferred with my peer reviewer to check on coding and analysis. As a result of her advice, I expanded my in vivo codes to include more of the participants' voices and then pulled it back together through pattern coding later in the process. I acknowledged my positionality and close connection to the program and therefore maintained a regular researcher's journal, documenting my work along the way, and I reviewed this documentation to actively check myself for bias. I began this study with the belief that DCSI is effective in increasing career readiness but managed my existing bias by registering these thoughts in member check-ins to assure confirmability of findings. I presented all participants with my researcher statement, which read:

> I have been employed at the Washington Center for 16 years and in that time have served in a number of roles. One such role was running academic programs, including DCSI one summer and often helping with this summer program. In more recent years, I have

supervised the staff who run it and have continued to be engaged with DCSI operations and student support. I am admittedly close to the DCSI program and care about its success. However, as I am currently completing this program evaluation, I am focused on accurate findings and will maintain the integrity of the research by setting aside my personal connection as much as possible.

Participants

From 2010–2019, 449 DCSI alumni participated in DCSI (see Appendix C). DCSI began in 2010 with two institutes: National Security and Business. In 2011, the Business Institute was replaced by Community Engagement, which later became Leadership and Community Engagement. In 2012, New Media was added as a third institute and was later renamed News & Media. In 2015, National Security was replaced with American Politics. Eight faculty taught DCSIs over the 10-year span, with an average class total of 16.23. Though they are full of useful insights, I chose not to interview these faculty members because my research focused specifically on student perceptions of their career readiness.

All 449 students were emailed (see Appendix D) and invited to take an electronic survey with biographical and background questions and five survey questions (see Appendix E), at the end of which they were asked if they were interested in participating in an interview. Those who were interested in an interview were offered the opportunity at the end of the survey to schedule an individual session with me if they felt comfortable. A total of 70 survey participants indicated interest in a follow-up interview. I pulled contact information for those who selected "yes" for the interview but kept survey results separate and anonymous in all analysis and reporting. I reviewed the list of participants who volunteered for interviews and assembled a stratified sample based on specific summer institute, graduation year, gender, race, major, and year of

participation in DCSI to help assure the most diversity of voice in this portion of the study. After the 30 individuals were invited, I maintained the listing of others who volunteered in the event the first 30 did not follow through on the interview. At the conclusion of all 30 interviews, I notified the remaining volunteers on the list that their service was not required and thanked them for volunteering. I sent an executive summary to all individuals who volunteered to be interviewed. Interviews took place in 1-hour Zoom sessions over a 30-day period.

Data Sources

This program evaluation used two data sources that I collected and analyzed. They included a DCSI alumni electronic survey and subsequent DCSI alumni individual interviews. Both data sources are described in the following subsections.

DCSI Alumni Electronic Survey

Acknowledging the disadvantages of self-reporting that exist in survey data, I adapted a design that included an expert panel review, pilot testing, and revision of a draft survey before implementation (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). First, I asked the expert panel to review my instruments and took their suggestions to refine the details. Second, I pilot tested the electronic survey with the 13 2020 DCSI participants who graduated in 2021.

To address the issue of reliability, which Mertens and Wilson (2019) described as "consistency in measurement…it answers the question, does an instrument measure the attribute consistently over multiple replications of the testing procedure?" (p. 341), I first used an expert panel to review the survey instrument and interview protocol. This panel provided suggestions for improvement, and I adjusted the survey instrument accordingly. Next, I conducted a pilot survey with 13 DCSI 2020 alumni who graduated in 2021 and revised instrumentation as necessary. This panel and subsequent piloting of the survey took place immediately after

proposal approval and subsequent IRB authorization and before launching the full evaluation. The changes to the survey included additional open-ended questions and adjusted language to glean more feedback on program strengths and weaknesses. The most notable change to the interview protocol was including a specific alignment with NACE competencies. Appendices E and F consist of the final survey and interview questions; earlier renditions were not included. In addition to my dissertation committee review, the expert panel consisted of a colleague from the W&M Washington Center who ran DCSI for 5 years, a colleague from the W&M Cohen Career Center, and a select group of leaders from the Washington Programs Consortium who run similar programs for their institutions. For the pilot survey, I invited the 13 DCSI 2020 alumni who graduated in 2021 to participate. I asked those who participated if they would allow me to pilot the interview protocol with them as well, which enabled me to confirm the estimated 1-hour interview time and accessibility of the prompts to provide useful information for the study. Reliability was a potential concern, as the span of participants varied from 2010–2019, and I sought to address this concern by employing an expert panel and through the pilot study and review. More recent graduates likely knew with great clarity how prepared they felt in their job search, for example, whereas those who graduated 10 years prior may not have remembered all of their initial perceptions. Conversely, earlier graduates had the test of time on elements of their internship program that were most salient.

I also addressed validity, answering the question of, "Does the instrument really measure what it is supposed to measure" (Mertens & Wilson, 2019, p. 341), through an expert panel review and pilot to ensure the survey specifically helped answer the evaluation questions. I anticipated some potential challenges with data collection due to outdated emails and likely low response rates to email surveys, but I was able to increase survey participation using direct

emails from Qualtrics and follow-up personalized emails (Dillman et al., 2009, 2014) in which I used the existing email and mail-merged to send individual emailed with their names inserted.

I emailed the 449 DCSI alumni (see Appendix D) to ask for their participation in a survey. The Qualtrics survey (see Appendix E) began with a brief definition of career readiness and the purpose of this program evaluation. Through biographical and background questions and five survey questions, participants were asked to reflect on which, if any, program elements helped them achieve career readiness and to what degree.

DCSI Alumni Individual Interviews

One-on-one interviews took place in 1-hour Zoom sessions. As noted previously, I asked graduates from the pilot survey to also participate in a pilot interview so I could assure the interview protocol provided the data desired. A total of 30 interviews took place over 30 days based on the volunteers who completed the survey and were selected for the interview portion of the study. As noted previously, well over 30 individuals volunteered for the follow-up interviews. To narrow this pool, I sought diversity of specific summer institutes, graduation year, gender, race, major, and year of participation in DCSI for analysis to consider differences; thus, those interviewed do not precisely represent the proportions in the overall program. The interview protocol (see Appendix F) began by reiterating my question from the survey: Acknowledging that I am the Center director, do you feel comfortable talking with me? Interview volunteers had the option to speak with a colleague instead of me in the event they were uncomfortable conducting the interview with me. Three of the 70 volunteers asked to have someone else conduct the interview, but after stratifying the 70 participants, the selected 30 did not include any of those three. Each participant completed a consent form (see Appendix G) in the survey and offered a recorded verbal consent in the subsequent interview, which included

open-ended questions of their perceptions of how DCSI may have helped develop their career readiness.

Data Collection

Data collection for the program evaluation followed a straightforward plan, although not without challenges. The survey distribution list for the participants was built from mailing lists the Center maintains of DCSI alumni. I sent an introductory email to all 449 DCSI alumni (570 emails total, as some alumni had two emails) to tell them to expect the forthcoming survey. A total of 47 emails bounced, but 523 went through. As the alumni pool spanned 10 years, there were threats to internal validity, namely the history of participants and maturation of mailing and email addresses. Participants agreed to participate through informed consent (see Appendix G) first, as previously mentioned. On June 20, 2022, I emailed the 449 DCSI alumni to tell them a survey was coming; then, I sent the survey via Qualtrics on June 23, 2022. I followed up to remind nonrespondents through Qualtrics on July 7, 2022. As a final effort, on July 11, 2022, I sent personalized emails to the 399 nonrespondents who were left at that point, and on July 22, 2022, I received my final participant response and then closed the survey.

A total of 70 survey participants were willing to interview, and from them, I selected a stratified list of 30 participants, whom I emailed on July 28, 2022, with information on how to schedule a Zoom session with me using Bookings software. All 30 booked interviews and I conducted the interviews between August 1–26, 2022.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this program evaluation had both a quantitative and a qualitative element. Quantitative analysis occurred for the electronic surveys to include descriptive

statistics, as is described in the following section. Qualitative analysis of the interviews entailed coding and thematic analysis, which is explained in more detail in the following subsections.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were based on a census survey sample (Mertens & Wilson, 2019), and I reported the total sample size for all those who received the electronic survey, which included the contacted sample and respondent sample. I analyzed the overall percentage of return and response rates per item. I analyzed these data with descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, frequency). I obtained information from W&M Institutional Research to break down the demographics of all DCSI alumni, including majors, gender, races, and class years. I checked for nonresponse bias to assure the final sample was representative of the larger population. Generational aspirations on what was perceived as career readiness varied, but those differences extended beyond the scope of the program evaluation and were not included in this study. In addition to the descriptive statistics noted, I conducted *t* tests to compare for any statistical differences based on specific summer institute, graduation year, gender, race, major, and year of participation in DCSI. For the fill-in responses, I used pattern coding to organize major ideas (Saldaña, 2016).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed once completed. These data were coded using a priori codes based on experiential learning theory (see Appendix H for a listing of these a priori codes). The first cycle of coding used the in vivo coding method so I could analyze data using participants' own words, not my interpretation. I read the transcript data and created emerging codes based on verbatim participant phrases to summarize, label, and later analyze the big ideas (Saldaña, 2016). The evaluation question guiding the exploration of this problem of practice was: How are DCSI alumni reporting their participation in the W&M Washington Center's internship-

based program helped them achieve career readiness? I recognized the likelihood I would find participant quotes that included phrases such as *build a network, make a connection, experience first-hand,* or *exposure to industries,* which became part of emerging codes that used the exact participant language.

Next, I used pattern coding as a second coding cycle to organize data from Cycle-1 coding into succinct themes and categories (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). Emergent themes allowed me to cluster and group the Cycle-1 codes into larger concepts for analysis. I used Dedoose software to assist me in pattern coding organization and synthesis of major ideas (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016).

Once the data analysis was complete, I began drawing preliminary findings for my evaluation questions. I built tables associated with the frequencies and percentages of respondents who identified a particular theme, which are located in Chapter 4. Appendix B provides a crosswalk of the evaluation questions, interview protocols, and related literature used to align the study with the evaluation questions.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

The following section outlines assumptions related to the program evaluation, particularly noting the expectation of honest answers and understanding issues with recall for older alumni. I also address delimitations associated with the 10-year span of the study and limitations of participants.

Assumptions

I assumed participants who voluntarily engaged were honest in their answers. Especially for graduates from the early years of the program, challenges may have emerged in recalling

their DCSI experiences, whereas more recent graduates may have recalled a clear connection with program features. I assumed DCSI contributed to graduates' career readiness.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to students who participated in DCSI between 2010–2019. The scope of the evaluation was limited in that it applied only to DCSI graduates over this 10-year span. Inferences cannot not be drawn that extend beyond this parameter, as variables such as program staffing and job market might influence the results. It is worth noting, however, these findings are useful for potential future employers to have an alumni perspective.

Limitations

Collected data from the program evaluation were most limited by participants' response rates, which in turn impacted the extent to which data analysis could apply. There might have also been response bias among individuals who chose to submit a survey, and those who did not, as DCSI graduates who feel connected to the Washington Center were more likely to respond than those who did not feel DCSI was influential on their careers. Another limitation was graduates might not have had have the ability to distill the specifics of their DCSI experiences versus their overall college experiences.

Additionally, there are limitations when using self-reported data, particularly for whom their DCSI experience was 12 years ago. Participants may not have been able to carefully consider their experiences in an objective way or may even have forgotten certain specifics of the experience. Moreover, participants might have felt as if they should present a positive response, or it might reflect poorly on them and their abilities.

Ethical Considerations

Guided by the program evaluation standard on propriety, I protected participants by offering anonymity, formal agreements, and transparency throughout the process. I acknowledged conflicts of interest upfront and checked in with DCSI stakeholders at every stage of the evaluation. I gained written informed consent (see Appendix G) and kept the data in W&M-secured online file storage only; no hard copies remain. To establish credibility or trustworthiness, and with participants' written permission, I recorded the interviews to review transcripts later on in the process, and I kept a reflective journal as encouraged by Mertens and Wilson (2019). I also maintained credibility by member checking and reviewing my bias at regular intervals. By establishing credibility this way, my findings are more likely to be useful.

As a current W&M employee, I was familiar with the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative program and received my human subjects certification from the W&M School of Education's Institutional Review Committee. In Spring 2022, I used the Protocol and Compliance Management system to submit my project proposal. My protocol included a rationale, full procedures, description of the participants, copy of all tests, questionnaires, all interview questions, the informed consent form, and documentation of all required Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative training.

Chapter Summary

The research methods described in this chapter allowed me to reliably investigate how DCSI alumni reported their participation in the internship-based program helped them achieve career readiness. As the evaluation used both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews for data generation, my mixed methods approach to analysis helped me produce credible results.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this program evaluation was to determine how D.C. Summer Institutes (DCSI) alumni who graduated between 2010–2019 perceived their participation in the William & Mary (W&M) Washington Center's internship-based program helped them achieve career readiness. I specifically looked to evaluate how DCSI alumni reported the four program elements helped in preparing them for career readiness:

1. How did the internship help the DCSI alumni achieve career readiness?
2. How did the faculty-led academic connection help the DCSI alumni achieve career readiness?
3. How did the alumni relationship building and professional networking help the DCSI alumni achieve career readiness?
4. How did the regularly guided reflection help the DCSI alumni achieve career readiness?

To address these questions, I used outcome evaluation to determine if DCSI outcomes aligned with current program intentions. The intended program outcomes included: (a) students experience authentic learning, (b) students develop professional skills, (c) students explore potential careers, (d) students cultivate a personal network, and (e) students connect learning and experience to careers. I developed and launched a quantitative survey and conducted 30 interviews to obtain qualitative data for this study. This outcome evaluation allowed me to

consider the impact of DCSI on participants and determine what career readiness DCSI alumni perceived as a result of their participation in the summer program.

This chapter outlines the results of my evaluation, which indicated DCSI students indeed perceived they graduated career ready. The findings suggested all four DCSI program elements are helpful in developing graduate career readiness to varying degrees. Additionally, community building within DCSI cohorts was among the most valuable aspects for participants, and individual faculty pedagogy and approaches to reflection were of paramount importance for many in increasing their confidence as they launched their careers. The internship experience itself was where students indicated they developed their professionalism (NACE, 2019) or "soft skills," as participants often referred to them, which contributed to their feeling of career readiness.

Survey Population Profile

The total population of DCSI alumni between 2010–2019 was 449. Of those 449 alumni, 97 participated in the DCSI Program Evaluation Survey via Qualtrics (22% response rate). I obtained demographic details, including DCSI participation year, graduation year, gender, race, and residency, on the full and sample populations from the W&M Office of Institutional Research. Participant quotes are labeled by respondent number and (Gender–Race).

Demographics

The demographic makeup of the 449 DCSI population and the smaller 97 participant sample are outlined in this section. Potential response bias is outlined for each demographic variable as well. First, Table 1 presents an outline of DCSI years of participation.

Table 1

D.C. Summer Institutes Years of Survey Sample and Full Population

Year	*n*		*N*	
	f	%	*f*	%
2010	1	1.0	29	6.5
2011	11	11.3	34	7.6
2012	9	9.3	43	9.6
Early years combined	21	22	106	24
2013	17	17.5	51	11.4
2014	8	8.2	47	10.5
2015	14	14.4	56	12.5
2016	6	6.2	50	11.1
Middle years combined	45	46	204	45
2017	6	6.2	46	10.2
2018	12	12.4	49	10.9
2019	13	13.4	44	9.0
Later years combined	31	32	139	31
Total	**97**	**100.0**	**449**	**100.0**

I bundled years of the cohorts to reflect the eras of the program that include the early years (i.e., 2010, 2011, 2012); middle years (i.e., 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016); and later years (i.e., 2017, 2018, 2019). A total of 21 student survey respondents were in the early years, 45 in the middle years, and 31 in the later years. The bulk of participants were in the middle years, in part because that bundle spanned 4 years compared to the other bins' 3 years. I assumed the middle and later years had more participation than the early years because the latter participants more recently participated in DCSI and were still close to the program. In each of the eras, though, some years had higher participation than others. Although I am not clear on what made some years more likely to engage, it could be the community they developed was particularly strong or the program felt particularly impactful. Of course, participation patterns may have been random as well. The DCSI years of participation representation in these three subgroups (i.e., early, middle, and later) in the survey sample was not statistically different than the overall population

of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 97) = .17, p = .91. As such, nonresponse bias was not present and the findings from the survey were representative of the larger group of students.

DCSI students participate anywhere from the summer after their 1st year to the summer after their final year. As a result, participants from 2010–2019 graduated from W&M as early as 2010 and as late as 2022. Few students who graduated in the earlier years responded to the survey relative to the middle and later years. This response rate may have been influenced by outdated contact information and a less recent connection to DCSI. Long-term career benefits could be an area for potential future study as well, because a few of those who did reference the long-term effects, such as Respondents 334 (M–SOC) and 369 (F–W), spoke of entire career paths as a result of a single DCSI exposure that set them on a fulfilling trajectory. The graduation year representation in the three subgroups (i.e., early, middle, and later) in the survey sample was not statistically different from the overall population of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 95) = .40, p = .81. As such, nonresponse bias was not present for the graduation variable and the findings from the survey were representative of the larger group of students.

Overall, more women than men participate in DCSI programs (see Table 2), and their representation was similar to the demographics of the university, where 56% of the Class of 2026 on-campus students were women (W&M Office of Undergraduate Admissions, 2022). More women than men responded to the survey (58% compared to 38%, respectively), and these percentages were comparable to the gender representation in the DSCI population, with men responding at rates slightly above their representation in the program. The gender representation in the survey sample was not statistically different from the overall population of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 93) = .07, p = .78. As such, nonresponse bias was not present and the findings from the survey were representative of the larger group of students.

Table 2

Gender of Survey Sample and Full Population

Gender	*n*		*N*	
	f	%	*f*	%
Unknown	4	4.1	20	4.5
Female	56	57.7	265	59
Male	37	38.1	164	36.5
Total	**97**	**100**	**449**	**100**

Race, Residency, and Financial Support

The next set of tables consider race and residency of the population and sample. Aggregate information on financial aid status is also discussed. More White students (66%) responded to the survey than students of color (25%) and the percentage of White students in the sample was larger than the overall population. The remaining students were of unknown race and it cannot be presumed that they were students of color, so I left them out of any race-based statistics (see Table 3). However, even though more White students responded to the survey, the race representation of White and non-White students in the survey sample was not statistically different from the overall population of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 89) = .94, p = .33. As such, nonresponse bias was not present and the findings from the survey were representative of the larger group of students. Notably, the nonresident alien and unknown race categories were least represented in the survey respondents. Further study is required to understand more about how international students in particular perceive the value of DCSI for career readiness.

Table 3

Race of Survey Sample and Full Population

Race	*n*		*N*	
	f	%	*f*	%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0	1	.2
Asian	5	5.2	27	6
Black/African American	7	7.2	31	6.9
Hispanic	9	9.3	45	10
Multirace	3	3.1	17	3.8
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	1	1	1	.2
Non-resident alien	0	0	10	2.2
Unknown	8	8.2	54	12.1
White	64	66	263	58.6
Total	**97**	**100**	**449**	**100**

For comparison, the W&M Class of 2025 demographics obtained from the W&M Class of 2025 demographic profile indicated 6% African American/Black, less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 12% Asian, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 4% International, 6% Multiracial, and 60% White students (W&M Office of Undergraduate Admissions, 2022). Data collected and shared by the university have changed over the years, and racial diversity has increased over time, so the Class of 2025 demographics are not a perfect comparison for the 2010–2019 DCSI students; still, this backdrop offered a general sense of the larger population in which to consider the DCSI population and sample. Comparing DCSI 2010–2019 (25% students of color, 66% White) to the Class of 2025 population (38% students of color, 60% White), for example, highlighted that across 2010–2019 overall, fewer students of color participated in DCSI relative to their representation on the main campus as of 2022.

Notably, internal documents report W&M Washington Center's larger population of students from all Study in D.C. programs between 2006–2020 was 1,540 students. The demographic breakdown of this larger Study in D.C. population more closely mirrors the larger

campus population, with even more representation of African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino students than on campus. Specifically, the Washington Center enrolled 7% African American/Black, less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 10% Asian, 11% Hispanic/Latino, 4% Multiracial, and 57% White students during this time frame. Students of color (combined at 33%) in all W&M Washington Center programs were only slightly less represented in this population than main campus.

The exact reasons for enrollment rates of non-White students have not been studied, but in focus group conversations I hosted over 10 years ago, I learned from students of color at W&M that their campus community was extremely important to them. The student organizations with which non-White students participate offer the students a strong sense of community in which they thrive. It is possible DCSI does not appear comfortable or even safe without the cohort of support students of color have on main campus. Additionally, although using race is an imperfect substitute for socioeconomic status, one reason for the lower rate of participation could be that low-income students cannot afford the additional cost of Study in D.C. programs, and according to literature, may not be able to afford to work in unpaid internships (Hora et al., 2020). A recent simulation allowed researchers to explore the effects of socioeconomic status as a substitute for race in affirmative action college admissions (Reardon et al., 2017). Although socioeconomic status is not a perfect alternative to race, considering socioeconomic status can still increase diversity in combination with other recruiting practices and will likely be a topic of continued study in the future.

For Study in D.C. programs overall, a disparity in racial representation compared to the university would have represented a larger issue of access for a range of students on campus, but the similar rates still reveal inequity. In particular, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022),

individuals identifying as African American/Black make up 13.4% of the population. Hispanic individuals comprise 18.5%, but only 6% of the W&M population and 7% of Study in D.C. programs are African American/Black. Only 9% of W&M and 11% of Study in D.C. students identify as Hispanic. Even though racial and ethnic representation on campus and in Study in D.C. programs is similar, an equity gap exists on campus that highlights a lack of representation of the general population relative to those attending W&M.

Like the main campus of W&M, students in DCSI programs are predominately in-state (62% compared to 34% out-of-state). The residency representation in the survey sample was not statistically different than the overall population of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 93) = .003, p = .95. As such, nonresponse bias was not present and the findings from the survey were representative of the larger group of students.

Next, though federal law prohibited me from obtaining specific scholarship status of the population and sample participants, the W&M Office of Financial Aid was able to provide aggregate data on the DCSI population, the survey sample, and the interview population. The data showed of the 449 students who participated in the program between 2010 and 2019, 58 DCSI students (13%) were eligible for Federal Pell Grants, which are "need-based and . . . awarded using the family's expected family contribution (EFC) as determined by the FAFSA" (W&M, n.d., para. 2). The data also reported comprehensively, without any individuals or individual demographics identified, a total of 16 of the 97 survey participants (16%) were Pell eligible. The Pell eligibility representation in the survey sample was not statistically different than the overall population of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 97) = .87, p = .35. As such, nonresponse bias was not present and the findings from the survey were representative of the larger group of students. The number of W&M Pell-eligible students increased over the 2010–

2019 DCSI years, as a relative point of comparison to the larger university, where "currently about 17% of William & Mary's in-state students are Pell Grant recipients" (W&M News, 2022, para. 8).

Majors and Topics of Study

I obtained data on students' majors; although the data were too varied to offer insight on all majors, it is worth noting the most common majors in both groups were (a) government (31% overall population, 38.1% sample), which is consistently in the top 10 list of undergraduate majors at W&M; (b) international relations (16.5% overall population, 13.4% sample); and (c) interdisciplinary studies (9.1% overall population, 11.3% sample). The specific and perhaps even narrow DCSI topics likely influence student interest in the larger DCSI program. DCSI faculty who teach courses specific to an academic department can offer DCSI classes that count toward a student's major requirements, thereby drawing more students from those majors. For comparison, the new model of the D.C. Semester Program is more interdisciplinary and less topical to draw students from a larger array of majors.

The quantitative data obtained from the surveys revealed the majority (51.55%) of DCSI alumni participated the summer after their 2nd year, whereas 31.96% participated after their 3rd year, 14.43% after their 1st year, just over 1% (one participant) the summer after their 4th year, and just over 1% (one participant) indicated "other." The survey gave participants the option to select "Other (e.g., summer after the 5th year, after 1st-year transfer year)," and just one participant indicated they participated in DCSI "the summer after I transferred to W&M as a sophomore."

The DCSI topic of study was another variable for the overall population of 449 DCSI students. The array of students among the various programs included 35.86% who studied

leadership and community engagement, matching the majority of survey participants (40.21%) who were leadership and engagement students. A total of 23.71% of survey participants studied new media (compared to 23.61% overall), 16.49% studied national security (compared to 18.26% overall), and 19.59% studied American politics (compared to 19.6% overall). Recall that national security was only available for the cohort years of 2010–2014. No business students participated in the survey. Business was only a topic once in 2010 with 12 students, so caution should be made on generalizing to include the business topic in interpreting the findings, as no business students were represented. However, the topic of study representation including national security, American politics, leadership and community engagement, and new media in the survey sample was not statistically different from the overall population of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 97) = .48, p = .392. Thus, nonresponse bias was not present for the range of topics offered and the findings from the survey were representative of the larger group of students in those areas.

To set the population in a national context within the labor market, it is notable that the labor market has varied for DCSI alumni during their respective graduation years, which may have shaded impressions of readiness among the graduates and highlighted areas beyond their control regarding job hiring. Unemployment rates, for example, as seen in Table 4, may have been a factor in the graduates' abilities to obtain postgraduate employment, affecting their sense of career readiness. I was unable to run an ANOVA to see if a statistical variance existed between reported career readiness and graduation year because there were not at least 20 participants in each group; binning the years into groups was similarly not useful, as unemployment rates are calculated annually. Caution should be made on interpretation or generalization.

Table 4

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Annual Unemployment Rates

Year	%
2010	9.6
2011	8.9
2012	8.1
2013	7.4
2014	6.2
2015	5.3
2016	4.9
2017	4.4
2018	3.9
2019	3.7
2020	8.1
2021	5.3

Note. Data are from "Data Tools," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d. (https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet). Data retrieved for reporting years 2010–2021.

The Great Recession occurred in the United States between 2007–2009, just prior to the DCSI years I explored in my program evaluation; unemployment rates remained high in subsequent years. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) noted, "One of the most widely recognized indicators of a recession is higher unemployment rates" (p. 2). Similarly, the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic-related recession that began in early 2020 may continue to play a role in graduates' employment beyond this timeframe. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) also reported:

> Total civilian employment, as measured by the Current Population Survey (CPS), fell by 21 million from the fourth quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2020, while the unemployment rate more than tripled, from 3.6% to 13.0%. This was the highest quarterly average unemployment rate in the history of the CPS. (p. 3)

The external context for DCSI graduates entering the labor market was useful in considering the setting for their perceived career readiness. Without data on specific DCSI graduates' unemployment rates, I would not be able to draw conclusions about level of DCSI graduates' readiness compared to the national average.

I had hoped to consider career readiness reported by the larger W&M graduating population during the same 10-year span, but neither overall readiness nor individual competencies are part of the *NACE Next Destination Survey* W&M uses to gather data on graduates. The survey data obtained were strictly related to employers, graduate schools, cities, and salaries.

Quantitative Survey Findings

The Qualtrics survey software and analysis asked participants about their expectations going into DCSI, how supported they felt in securing their DCSI internships, and if they felt confident in their preparation to start their DCSI internships. Most participants felt confident in their preparation for their DCSI internships. All 97 answered the question, and 72.16% responded *yes*, they felt confident starting their internships, 26.8% felt *somewhat confident*, and only 1.03% *did not feel confident*. At the start of the internship, survey respondents already exhibited a high level of confidence. Broken down by race and gender, *t* tests revealed no significant difference in levels of confidence going into the internships. DCSI staff help prepare participants for their internships before they begin, so it would be interesting to survey future participants immediately upon enrollment, before any support is offered, and then again upon starting the internship months later.

Overall Career Readiness

When asked on a scale from 0–10, (i.e., 0 = *not at all* and 10 = *completely*), how much participation in DCSI helped participants achieve career readiness, the mean response was 7.71 (SD = 1.93, n = 97). Participants noted an overall preparation and readiness to start their careers. I considered a breakdown of subgroup responses, as noted later in this section. Both gender and race subgroups had statistically different responses as to how much DCSI helped them achieve overall career readiness.

Breaking down overall career readiness by demographics, I found the following to have no significant difference:

- DCSI year of participation: An ANOVA comparing the group outcomes indicated no significant differences between the binned years (i.e., early, middle, and later) of participation, $F(9, 87) = .511$, $p > .05$.
- Graduation year: An ANOVA comparing the group outcomes indicated no significant differences between the graduation years, (12.84) = .376, $p > .05$.
- DCSI topic of study: An ANOVA comparing the group outcomes indicated no significant differences between DCSI topic of study, $F(3, 93) = 1.02$, $p > .05$.

Both gender and race did have statistically significant differences in perceived readiness.

Women perceived they achieved more career readiness from the program than men. An independent t test comparing the group outcomes indicated significant differences between genders, $t(91) = 0.04$, $p < .05$. Men reported a mean of 7.24 on a career readiness scale of 0–10, whereas women reported a mean of 7.96. This difference represented a small effect size (Cohen's d = .373). What remained unknown is what the participants expected from the

program. Men may have felt more career ready prior to DCSI, and perhaps did not develop as much as women during the program, who may have been less confident prior to DCSI.

I did not have enough members of each race to break them down individually, but I determined that non-White students perceived they achieved more career readiness than White students. White students reported a mean of 7.5 on a career readiness scale of 0–10, whereas non-White students reported a mean of 8.4. An independent *t* test comparing the group outcomes indicated a significant difference between race, $t(87) = .02$, $p < .05$. This difference represented a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = .483$). Similar to men versus women, White students may have felt more career ready prior to DCSI, and perhaps did not develop as much as non-White students, who may have had fewer prior opportunities to develop readiness. As discussed in Chapter 2, the practice of internships presents equity issues of access to opportunities. It is a privilege that students of means and existing networks can seamlessly take advantage of internship opportunities while others struggle to participate in internships due to a variety of challenges, including the need for paid employment. In fact, although internships benefit those who participate—as seen in the DCSI survey—they may also increase inequities of privilege, as Hora et al. (2018) discussed:

> While an internship may open the doors of opportunity for some, access to these potentially transformative experiences are by no means available to all college students and instead may represent yet another obstacle to social mobility as well as a vehicle for reproducing privilege and power. Of course, these barriers are unfortunate for all students, but may be especially problematic for low-income, first-generation, and/or minoritized students for whom an internship may be an especially valuable professional experience. (pp. 29–30)

Students bring their identities and demographic makeup into DCSI with them and their identities, similarly influencing what they take out with them. Certainly, DCSI participants, such as college students generally, have intersecting identities, which put them in various demographic and social categories at the same time. Though not something I specifically researched in this program evaluation, the impact of intersecting identities on career readiness could be studied in the future. Majority groups (e.g., men and White students in DCSI) may have been overconfident in their perceptions of career readiness going into DCSI and perceived less growth because of participation. I also assumed other groups (e.g., women and non-White students) may have had less confidence entering DCSI and, therefore had more to gain during their experiences. There was also no significant difference in perceived internship preparedness by gender or race in my survey, suggesting the pre-internship preparatory period discussed prior may have been impactful for women and non-White students especially. Internship programs like DCSI offer opportunities to students who have the most to gain (Najmabadi, 2017), and DCSI women and non-White students did perceive they gained more from the DCSI applied learning model.

With intersectionality in mind, I compared the mean perceived overall career readiness for White men, White women, men of color, and women of color (see Table 5). Although none were statistically significant, note that women of color reported the highest mean readiness, whereas White men reported the lowest.

Table 5

Survey Report of Overall Career Readiness, Gender, and Race Intersections

Gender and Race Intersection	*M*	*SD*
White men	7.04	2.07
Men of color	7.80	1.48
White women	7.84	1.57
Women of color	8.56	2.09

Career Readiness in Each NACE Competency

Breaking down career readiness further, participants reported participation in DCSI helped them achieve career readiness in each of the following NACE career competencies. Recall the scale ranged between 0–10, where 0 = *not at all*, and 10 = *completely* (see Table 6).

Table 6

Survey Report of Career Readiness by Competency

Career competency	*M*	*SD*
Digital technology	5.61	2.76
Global/intercultural fluency	5.61	3.00
Leadership	6.77	2.65
Teamwork/collaboration	7.02	2.22
Critical thinking/problem solving	7.11	2.21
Career management	7.43	2.37
Oral/written communications	7.62	2.25
Professionalism/work ethic	8.59	1.62

Note. Data are from "Career Readiness Fact Sheet," by National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2019 (https://www.naceweb.org/uploadedfiles/pages/knowledge/articles/career-readiness-fact-sheet.pdf).

Professionalism was the leading competency about which the survey respondents felt most confident due to their participation in DCSI, which was also reflected later in interview data. Sometimes referred to by participants as *soft skills* (Hora et al., 2018), the increased ability to function effectively in the workplace as a result of participating in DCSI was similarly

referenced often by interview participants. Digital technology and global/intercultural fluency ranked lowest of the competencies, which might be attributed to the rapid change in specific skills required in these areas. My assumption was the academic content provided by W&M around digital technology and global/intercultural fluency is only experienced in specific internship opportunities. Although the original mission of the W&M Washington Center in 2001 did include a focus on preparing students for the global world, the Center has not intentionally included a global goal in any academic offerings.

In the 2015–2016 academic year, the larger university moved to a new general education curriculum, commonly referred to as the College (COLL) curriculum, which does include a globally focused course; however, only once in 2021 did a DCSI course fulfill this standard and never during the 2010–2019 span I evaluated. Given the NACE career competencies include a global fluency, the efforts at W&M and in DCSI to develop this competency have been scant. I further assumed many DCSI participants are not given the opportunity to engage with either digital technology or global/intercultural fluency areas during their program experiences, whereas the other competencies are likely practiced in most program experiences. Because both digital technology and global/intercultural fluency are competencies employers seek in recent graduates, there was a surprising lack of both in the W&M curriculum, including at the Washington Center. The lack of internationalization in particular was startling against the backdrop of W&M receiving the 2016 Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization (Hoving, 2016). Furthermore, the American Council on Education's (n.d.) "Model for Comprehensive Internationalization" suggested the most effective strategies for internationalization efforts are those that are integrated throughout the university, which would include internship programs like DCSI.

Analyzing the perceived readiness of each career competency by each of the DCSI topics revealed a few distinctions as well; for example, new media students perceived a greater readiness in digital technology ($M = 7.3$) and communications ($M = 7.91$) than students in the other topics. Leadership and community engagement students perceived a greater readiness in leadership ($M = 7.72$) and global/intercultural fluency ($M = 5.90$), and American politics students perceived a greater readiness in professionalism ($M = 9.11$) than students in the other topics.

Further analysis of the NACE results demonstrated that non-White participants reported participation in DCSI helped them achieve career readiness to a higher degree in every career competency (see Table 7). Over half of the career competencies highlighted statistically significant differences for students of color relative to their White peers. Students of color perceived more benefits than White participants in digital technology, global/intercultural fluency, teamwork/collaboration, critical thinking/problem solving, oral/written communications, and professionalism/work ethic. This finding is important to note as higher education works to increase access to programs like DCSI. As has been discussed, often students who cannot access internship programs are the ones who need them most, and these findings were consistent with the higher perceived values by students of color in this program evaluation. Each of the competencies and differences in perceptions have been designated in Table 7. A *t* test showed the *p* value was < 0.05 in five categories and $p < .01$ in one category; therefore, the differences were statistically significant, and the differences represented medium–large effect sizes.

Table 7

Survey Report of Career Readiness by Competency, Non-White Compared to White Participants

Career competency	Non-White *M*	White *M*	*p*	Cohen's *d,* effect size
Digital technology*	6.56	5.19	.020	.96, large
Global/intercultural fluency*	6.68	5.13	.015	.99, large
Leadership	7.08	6.59	.224	
Teamwork/collaboration*	7.80	6.73	.021	.49, medium
Critical thinking/problem solving*	7.84	6.80	.021	.49, medium
Career management	7.64	7.31	.287	
Oral/written communications*	8.44	7.28	.015	.52, medium
Professionalism/work ethic**	9.28	8.33	.006	1.08, large

*p <. 05; **p < .01.

The reason for higher perceived readiness in the competencies was assumed to be the same as that of general career readiness—a greater confidence likely exists in White students going into DCSI due to privilege and past experiences and exposure to networking opportunities. Similarly, women reported participation in DCSI helped them achieve career readiness to a higher degree in 6 of the 8 career competencies (see Table 8). Even though the reported differences were higher for women compared to men, a *t* test showed the *p* value was > 0.05 in all categories; therefore, none of the differences reported for the competencies were statistically significant.

Table 8

Survey Report of Career Readiness by Competency, Male Compared to Female Participants

Career competency	Male *M*	Female *M*
Digital technology	5.41	5.64
Global/intercultural fluency	5.81	5.43
Leadership	6.27	6.98
Teamwork/collaboration	7.16	6.93
Critical thinking/problem solving	6.92	7.14
Career management	7.3	7.48
Oral/written communications	7.51	7.61
Professionalism/work ethic	8.32	8.7

Notably, female participants reported participation in DCSI helped them achieve career readiness to a higher degree in every career competency except global/intercultural fluency and teamwork/collaboration.

Career Readiness and DCSI Program Elements

Considering the format in which DCSI is offered to students, I was also interested to determine if certain program elements were more effective than others in developing career readiness. When asked on a scale from 0–10 (i.e., 0 = *not at all*, and 10 = *completely*) how helpful were the following program elements in helping them achieve career readiness, all 97 participants answered the question, and DCSI alumni reported the following perceptions (see Table 9).

Table 9

Survey Report of Program Elements in Helping Achieve Career Readiness

Field	*M*	*SD*
The alumni relationship building and professional networking	6.73	2.85
The faculty-led academic courses	7.08	2.59
The opportunities for reflection	7.15	2.64
The internship placement	7.42	2.53

Internship placements ranked most highly for DCSI participants, but on average, all four elements were ranked as helpful. The opportunity for reflection was valued by the survey participants, with faculty-led courses viewed similarly. The least helpful of the program components were alumni connections. All programs involved alumni as class speakers, and each student in each program gets a one-on-one alumni mentor assigned based on career interests. Some programs also include alumni in internship sites and some even as supervisors, although

that practice is not as common. Interestingly, in the interview portion of my evaluation, relationships and connections were generally regarded as highly valuable, second to internships.

Considering the differences in race and gender related to the competencies, I analyzed DCSI program element findings along race and gender lines as well. Non-White participants reported all four program elements were more effective than White participants in developing career readiness; however, just alumni relationship building and professional networking and the opportunities for reflection represented statistically significant differences. I designated each of the elements and the differences in perceptions in Table 10. A *t* test shows the *p* value is < 0.01 in the two areas; therefore, the differences were statistically significant, and the differences represented small–medium effect sizes. Perhaps the non-White students appreciated DCSI program elements more than White students who potentially had more privilege. Notably, students of color felt opportunities for reflection were more impactful relative to their White peers, and they valued the alumni and professional networking more. As stated prior, this finding may indicate White students have more access to professional networks compared to students of color, or at least different networks.

Table 10

Survey Report of Program Elements in Helping Achieve Career Readiness, Non-White Compared to White Participants

Field	Non-White *M*	White *M*	*p*	Cohen's *d,* effect size
The alumni relationship building and professional networking*	8.16	6.27	.002	.13, small
The faculty-led academic courses	7.72	6.84	.157	
The opportunities for reflection*	8.32	6.73	.004	.63, medium
The internship placement	7.76	7.44	.293	

*$p < .01$.

Female participants reported all four program elements were more effective than male participants in developing career readiness, if only slightly; however, just alumni relationship building and professional networking, along with internship placement, represented statistically significant differences. Each of the elements and the differences in perceptions are found in Table 11. A *t* test showed the *p* value was < 0.05 in the two areas; therefore, the differences were statistically significant, and the differences represented small effect sizes. Similar to race, the female students may have valued DCSI program elements more than male students because they had less confidence or experience going into DCSI. The differences between men and women, however, were less than the differences between students of color and White students, with small effect sizes.

Table 11

Survey Report of Program Elements in Helping Achieve Career Readiness, Male Compared to Female Participants

Field	Male *M*	Female *M*	*p*	Cohen's *d,* effect size
*The alumni relationship building and professional networking	6.11	7.13	.047	.36, small
The faculty-led academic courses	7.00	7.04	.475	
The opportunities for reflection	6.89	7.25	.261	
*The internship placement	6.84	7.80	.038	.38, small

*$p < .05$.

Finally, breaking down DCSI program elements by topic determined variances in terms of which DCSI program elements each topical cohort found most valuable. American politics students ranked alumni relationship building and professional networking most highly, which may have been the case because much of political work is often characterized as networking. Leadership and community engagement students ranked reflection most highly, as might be

expected given the intentional focus on reflection throughout the experience for this program. New media students ranked the internship experience most highly. None of these ranking differences were noted as statistically significant.

Qualitative Themes From Surveys

Because the survey included required open-ended questions, all 97 participants answered them, and I coded responses through a first round of in vivo coding, followed by pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016); throughout these steps, common themes emerged. Participant quotes were labeled by respondent number and (Gender–Race). Responses focused on the positive experiences and outcomes for participants. Just six respondents spoke negatively about specific program aspects or experiences, with seemingly little or no pattern. Of those six, four were women and two men; five were White and one unknown race; three DCSI topics were represented; two were from 2014, one from 2015, two from 2016, and one from 2020; one of the negative commenters still ranked their career readiness at a 10 out of 10, and the others between 2–6. Five of the six comments focused on lack of support; for example, Respondent 249 (F–W) shared, "It would have been helpful to have more support finding an internship. I was happy with the internship I had, and I wouldn't change it, but I remember having some trouble along the way while applying to internships." Participants also regularly mentioned the cost of the program or that internships are often unpaid.

Most notably, though, survey participants consistently spoke about the benefits of a program that combines theory and practice. For example, Respondent 47 (F–W) shared, "DCSI enabled me to get real world experience. It's great to study things in class, but the internship showed me how I can actually turn those skills I learned in class, like research and writing, into job skills." Respondent 125 (F–SOC) shared:

> DCSI was the bridge between my classes on campus and the working field. I appreciated my coursework was about conversations with leaders and personal and group reflections. It provided the space to really think about and experience daily work life while having a safety net of support.

Finally, Respondent 315 (M-SOC) wrote, "Without the internship opportunity through DCSI, I would not be readied to the real-world right after graduation, and probably would have a hard time to adjust the gap between the school and the world for a while."

In addition to the theory-to-practice theme, professionalism, networking, faculty and academics, community, support, and confidence were all mentioned consistently by participants. Professionalism, which was the top-valued NACE competency as discussed prior, came up consistently in surveys and interviews for all students, and was summarized by Respondent 263 (F–W), who noted, "I applied written/oral communication skills and critical thinking to adapt to short turn requirements and provide high quality deliverables. I learned to manage my time, career path, and continued education with little supervision." Respondent 302 (F–W) stated succinctly that DCSI "taught [her] a lot of professional work ethics and the patience of leadership." To compare two voices of students of color on the topic, Respondent 231 (F–SOC) wrote:

> I thought the emphasis on timeliness, being prepared to meet with new people every day, and the prioritization of professionalism was extremely important in helping me get a taste of what the "real world" was like while I was still an undergrad.

Respondent 304 (M–SOC), in his survey response, wrote:

> The mindset of always asking for more projects, and always being willing to take on even the littlest or most mundane tasks. It not only creates a level of rapport with your

supervisor but also allows you to show your dedication to the office. That, combined with the emphasis on soft skills in the workplace really helped me navigate office dynamics and conversations regarding professional development.

Networking came up less in survey comments and much more often in interviews, which I discuss in the next section. Networking in the surveys was often referenced in relation to career management; for example, Respondent 227 (F–W) wrote, "The 2 weeks of networking in all fields is so vital. I would never have the job I have now if I didn't get the chance to see careers outside of what I thought I wanted," whereas Respondent 443 (F–W) shared, "more than anything, the program laid a groundwork for me to establish a great network, and I remember my final project requiring me to rely on that network and establish connections that I still foster."

Faculty-led academics developed as a theme throughout many of the survey responses with participants via specifically referencing their DCSI professors on at least 37 occasions. Two such examples included Respondent 302 (unknown), who noted, "The leadership and community engagement class was perfect. Drew Stelljes is incredible, and he should not change a single thing!" Respondent 381 (M–unknown) stated, "Excellent professor [Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault, National Security professor] blended academia with her real-world experience in class discussions." Others spoke more generally, as did Respondent 42 (F–SOC), who wrote, "The coursework allowed me to reflect on real-world problems I faced in my internship by using critical thinking and research."

The value of being part of a cohort and the community that DCSI provided was another top theme brought up specifically in 11 of the 97 open-ended survey questions without explicitly asking about it. Respondent 418 (F–W) offered:

> The absolute best thing that I got out of DCSI is the relationships that I developed with fellow student participants…The various focuses of DCSI mean that participants come from every corner and department on campus—providing the opportunity to meet people that you might otherwise not. I valued the social moments during DCSI that allowed bonds to be created and relationships to build.

Community is a cornerstone for having a sense of belonging in college, so it was not surprising to read comments such as that of Respondent 245 (F–W), who wrote:

> I appreciated the overall connectivity of the program—how many of us lived near each other, how many of us lived near each other, how there were various events throughout the summer term to keep us in the loop, panels, etc.

Respondent 249 (F–W) went so far as to write:

> I really appreciated the community aspects of DCSI, from the joint panels at the Washington Center to the planned social events throughout the summer. DCSI was the first time I truly felt community at William & Mary, thanks in large part due to the community.

Finally, many participants felt increased confidence and the support system DCSI offered were consistent reasons they increased their career readiness. Applying learning to practice helps students learn authentically, and when students are secure in what they have learned, they feel more confident (Eather et al., 2019). Respondent 418 (F–W) wrote:

> I most valued the support that DCSI provided throughout the process of finding an internship and living off-campus for the summer. Because I had support in applying for internships, securing housing, etc., I was more able to focus on making connections

between coursework and real-world problems. The student support services had the biggest impact on allowing me to gain the most from my DCSI experience.

Respondent 332 (F–W) shared, "The whole DCSI experience pushed me out of my comfort zone and helped me gain confidence. I had a lot of anxiety about finding a career postgrad and it made it seem manageable." Some also talked about the benefits of living in the city of Washington, D.C., and how the overall exposure to people and places was useful in their development.

Interview Population

From the 97 survey respondents, I selected a stratified sample of 30 interview candidates from those who volunteered to be interviewed based on institute topic, graduation year, gender, race, major, and year of participation in DCSI to help ensure the most possible diversity of voice in this portion of the study and to best represent the demographic information to which I had access. Because I was permitted to obtain data on Pell Grant eligibility, I did not consider these data in my selection process; however, the W&M Office of Financial Aid did analyze my data and provided a summary count, without noting individuals or their demographics, that 9 of the 30 interviewees were Pell-eligible students. DCSI year of participation, graduation year, gender, race, residency, and topic of study were factors in the creation of the interview pool. The 30 candidates to whom I reached out via email all responded and did participate in a Zoom interview lasting, on average, 45 minutes. The interviews used the protocol outlined in Appendix F. To account for all variables in just 30 interviews, I prioritized female and non-White participants to ensure their voices came through interview data given the differences found in their survey responses. I stratified the other variables to the greatest extent possible. Table 12 outlines DCSI years of participation for interviewees.

Table 12

D.C. Summer Institute Years of Interview Participants

Year of participation	*f*	%
2010	1	3.3
2011	2	6.7
2012	4	13.3
Early years combined	7	23.3
2013	5	16.7
2014	4	13.3
2015	4	13.3
2016	3	10
Middle years combined	16	53.3
2017	1	3.3
2018	3	10
2019	3	10
Later years combined	7	23.3
Total	**30**	**100**

There were understandably more interview participants in the middle years bin, which included 1 additional year. The rate of participation in the survey was higher in these years as well, possibly because those participants were more secure in their careers at the time of participation, and the distance from W&M made them feel a desire to connect back. Even so, there was more representation in the middle years, as year of participation was a less important demographic of which to ensure equal representation during my stratification. I assumed the participants in these middle years were most likely to still remember their DCSI experiences while also having been in their careers for a few years, whereas new graduates, for example, may have still been getting settled into their careers. The DCSI year of participation representation in the three subgroups (i.e., early, middle, and later) in the interview sample was not statistically different than the overall population of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 30) = .91, p = .63. As such, those interviewed were representative of the larger population of students in the

program for their cohort years of participation. Table 13 considers graduation years of interviewees.

Table 13

Graduation Years of Interview Participants

Graduation year	*f*	%
2010–2011	1	3.3
2011–2012	1	3.3
2012–2013	4	13.3
2013–2014	2	6.7
Early years combined	8	26.6
2014–2015	6	20
2015–2016	2	6.7
2016–2017	2	6.7
2017–2018	2	6.7
Middle years combined	12	40
2018–2019	1	3.3
2019–2020	5	16.7
2020–2021	3	10
2021–2022	1	3.3
Later years combined	10	33.3
Total	**30**	**100**

Again, when sorted by graduation year, the middle years were overrepresented because of the same stratification process as year of participation (see Table 13). Year of participation and year of graduation were less important demographics to consider than race, gender, or topic. I assumed 2014–2015 had a particularly large representation in those interviewed simply by chance. There was no particular reason that those who graduated in 2014–2015 would feel more connected than other years. Despite the 1 larger year, the graduation year of participant representation in the three subgroups (i.e., early, middle, and later) of the interview sample was not statistically different than the overall population of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 30)

= .10, p = .95. As such, those participating in the interviews represented the graduation years of the overall population.

The gender representation in the interview sample was not statistically different than the overall population of students involved in DCSI despite the intentional focus on women, X^2 (1, n = 29) = .16, p = .69 (see Table 14). Additionally, of the 70 survey participants who were willing to interview, 56% were women, whereas only 39% were men, and 6% were unknown. I sought to include the female voice intentionally, and so the slightly larger representation in the interview pool was a result of this decision.

Table 14

Gender of Interview Participants

Gender	*f*	%
Unknown	1	3.3
Female	19	63.3
Male	10	33.3
Total	**30**	**100**

Given existing research on how valuable internship opportunities can be for underrepresented students (Barnett & Kopko, 2020; Cantor, 1995;; Hora et al., 2019, 2020; Kinzie, 2010), I intentionally included students of color to be represented in the interviews at higher rates than overall program participation. Despite my intentions, the racial representation of White and non-White students in the interview sample was also not statistically different than the overall population of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 29) = 1.56, p = .21 (see Table 15).

Table 15

Race of Interview Participants

Race	*f*	%
Unknown	1	3.3
Asian	3	10
Black/African American	3	10
Hispanic	4	13.3
Multi-race	2	6.7
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	1	3.3
White	16	53.3
Total	**30**	**100**

DCSI topics in which the interview participants partook included 50% leadership and community engagement, 23.3% new media, 6.67% national security, and 20% American politics. Recall, leadership and community engagement students in the overall 449 population made up 35.86% of all DCSI participants. Even so, the topics of study representation in the interview sample was not statistically different than the overall topics of study for the population of students involved in DCSI, X^2 (1, n = 30) = 3.58, p = .31. I assumed given the nature of the leadership and community engagement topic, those participants were particularly inclined to engage with DCSI as alumni, including survey and interview requests, given reflective practice is an integral part of the leadership and community engagement course.

Interview Findings and Themes

The 30 interviews took place over Summer 2022 following survey dissemination. Table 16 provides a summary profile of the students interviewed for reference as I share some of their experiences in quotations.

Table 16

Interview Participant List

Respondent	DCSI year	DCSI topic	Graduation year	Gender	Race
19	2015	AP	2016–2017	Female	Hispanic
20	2012	LCE	2012–2013	Male	Asian
30	2014	NM	2014–2015	Female	White
33	2018	AP	2019–2020	Male	White
36	2019	LCE	2021–2022	Unknown	Unknown
41	2015	NM	2019–2020	Female	Black/African Am.
42	2016	AP	2017–2018	Female	Black/African Am.
46	2010	NM	2011–2012	Female	White
88	2011	NS	2010–2011	Male	White
93	2014	NM	2015–2016	Male	White
100	2013	LCE	2014–2015	Male	White
125	2019	LCE	2020–2021	Female	Hispanic
134	2013	LCE	2014–2015	Female	Black/African Am.
139	2012	LCE	2012–2013	Female	Multi-race
140	2015	LCE	2016–2017	Female	White
145	2019	AP	2020–2021	Female	Asian
153	2016	LCE	2020–2021	Female	White
155	2018	LCE	2019–2020	Female	White
183	2017	LCE	2019–2020	Male	White
205	2013	LCE	2013–2014	Female	White
232	2016	AP	2017–2018	Female	White
248	2014	LCE	2014–2015	Female	White
266	2013	NM	2014–2015	Female	Hispanic
288	2015	NM	2018–2019	Female	White
304	2018	LCE	2019–2020	Male	Hispanic
334	2014	LCE	2014–2015	Male	Nat.HI/Oth.Pac.Isl.
359	2012	AP	2012–2013	Female	Multi-race
369	2011	LCE	2012–2013	Female	White
375	2012	NM	2013–2014	Male	White
447	2013	NS	2015–2016	Male	Asian

Note. DCSI = D.C. Summer Institute. Topical abbreviations: AP = American Politics; LCE = Leadership and community engagement; NM = New media; NS = National security.

Coding Results

The information presented in this section highlights the a priori codes I used for the first round of coding my interviews (see Appendix H). In particular, I report on the interviewees'

views on their career competencies and DCSI program elements. Of these a priori codes, the internship experience was referenced the most, at 66 counts, by 27 of the 30 participants. Professionalism was discussed 58 times by 28 participants, and career management was mentioned next in frequency with 46 references by 21 participants. Networking and reflection were close behind.

Next, I used in vivo coding to capture participants' own words to describe their experiences and perceived career readiness. Participants shared thoughts on community and their cohort relationships 76 times—by far the most considered topic, and not one I specifically asked about. This finding became its own theme in my third round. Support was the next most discussed topic, at 56 references, followed by exposure at 46, confidence at 41, and site visits/hands-on experiences at 34. Additional in vivo topics—including soft skills, the program's theory-to-practice combination, and living in D.C.—all came up often as well and were a big part of students' overall DCSI experiences.

Finally, I organized the second-round coding into larger themes, which I describe in the next section. Conducting 30 interviews of DCSI alumni allowed me to explore deeply the experiences that led participants to their varying levels of post-program career readiness. The emergent themes, along with a sample of participant quotes in this section, help demonstrate why DCSI aided participants to develop career readiness. The interview participants shared candidly about their DCSI memories and considered in depth their perceptions of career readiness as a result of their participation in the program. All 30 participants perceived an increase in their readiness that they attributed to DCSI. Varying perspectives existed among participants, outlining the program elements that meant the most to them; for example, some felt the internship experience itself helped prepare them the most for their ultimate career paths.

As has been noted, women and students of color reported a higher level of perceived career readiness as a result of their DCSI participation; however, during the interviews, these differences were less obvious. Because the interviewees volunteered their time to share their experiences, and were, therefore, self-selected, their feedback was perhaps universally positive across gender and race. Additionally, because I intentionally overrepresented women and students of color in the interview population, any quantitative differences would be statistically insignificant.

An analysis of the 30 interview transcripts with these participants and subsequent coding procured three main themes. The first and most prevalent theme was the value of DCSI community built through various experiences and especially within topic cohorts. The community and cohort theme centered on the value of community within each institute cohort and emerged as the primary theme most consistently referenced. The second theme was the importance of staff and faculty support and DCSI participants' increased confidence, which came up consistently across interviewees. This theme reflected the increase in confidence felt by participants, which they attributed to the support they felt in the program or their exposure, including to the city of D.C. itself. The third theme was the development of professional or soft skills through the overall DCSI experience. Participants' development of professional skills also ranked highest as the career competency in the survey portion of this evaluation.

Community and Cohort

A full 93% of interview participants mentioned their cohort helped them build community. Community building mostly occurred within the individual institutes, and sometimes between or across them. The students came together in class, but also in their apartments, on the metro, and in social activities. They reflected on the internship together and

became colleagues and oftentimes friends. The value students placed on community was significant. In fact, for some, the relationships they developed made up their biggest takeaways from DCSI. For example, Respondent 447 (M–SOC) commented:

> I think it was extremely useful to just have a good group of friends and peers, who are going through internship experiences as well to learn from each other. You know, daily experiences in a work setting, because this was one of my, you know, first official workplace experiences, and it was just really beneficial to have people with me who were in a similar place, so I think the sense of community overall was one of the most memorable aspects.

Having the opportunity to debrief with others having similar experiences helped build community.

Reflection played a key role for many when it came to building community. Students would share and reflect on internship experiences, building a bond that allowed them to make connections. As Respondent 266 (F–SOC) shared:

> You're living together wherever you are and like you go back and you're like, sharing your experiences about your internship with your people that you've had a class together or maybe the people who have even the different class, but are also doing program, and you're able to, like, share your experiences and like learn together through that internship. And like not only did you have the support of the W&M professors and the staff on like how to approach your internship, but you have your peers to share their thoughts on like what's going on, you know because it's a completely new experience so you're not just like siloed you know, in your own head. And that's so important because, like if you have

> something going on at your internship that you don't know what to think about you want to be able to share that with someone and understand how you want to approach it.

The sentiment of organic reflection and authentic learning shared by Respondent 266 provided an example of the power of integrated learning (Barber, 2020) and the value of reflection as a part of the learning cycle (D. A. Kolb, 1984).

For students in the DCSI internship program, sharing what they were thinking, experiencing, and feeling with others, rather than being alone, took away stress, anxiety, and even built confidence. There was reassurance in knowing that others, regardless of industry or sector, found the same issues in their workplace, and then solved them together. The informal reflection through cohort and community opportunities to engage with one another consistently emerged as valuable for participants, which was consistent with Barber's (2020) integration of learning theory. Learning communities, like DCSI, have been touted as a high-impact practice (HIP; Kuh, 2008) and the DCSI interviews indicated these took place beyond the classroom and indeed had a significant impact on students' learning. As Respondent 19 (F–SOC) put it:

> You would think that people would say the internship aspect [is most important], but I think that speaks to the strength of the other aspects of the program that the internship isn't pegged at the very top. That it really was very valuable, and had it had a profound impact because of the people around and the opportunities that we had throughout that summer.

Even though the internship was a common experience and a program element that many participants expressed was actually what drew them to DCSI in the first place, the internship alone was not what made students perceive DCSI to be so valuable. In fact, Respondent 140 (F–W) shared:

> Part of why I went to William & Mary was because I was interested in doing government or international relations work, and so having the opportunity to have the logistics taken care of while also having work experience there was appealing and also for getting experience.

In the end, for most participants, the people, opportunities, and academics around the internship that came together through reflection allowed participants to grow, oftentimes with their cohort. Collaborative learning can be a powerful tool for students, which was not a factor I originally considered in this program evaluation. Respondent 134 (F–SOC) expressed she participated in DCSI because, as she noted, "There was pressure to do something impactful over the summer…[and I] genuinely wanted to live and work in DC, and hoped to make some solid connections;" yet, in the end, she recalled feeling that "the cohort and the friendships" stood out to her most.

Support and Increased Confidence

The second theme that emerged through my interviews was the participants' appreciation of the personalized support they received and the increased confidence they perceived after the program. I learned students felt confident going into their internships, which may account for some of this post-program confidence as well, but DCSI program support began upon acceptance and continued as students prepared for, progressed through, and completed their internship experiences. Unlike doing an internship on one's own, DCSI participants get a dedicated W&M Washington Center team member who helps them find, apply for, and earn internships. The W&M Washington Center staff often use alumni or other networks to give DCSI participants access to internship opportunities that not all W&M students might be able to access. Once the internship is secured, the same W&M team member meets with the supervisor and intern

regularly to ensure a mutually beneficial experience and troubleshoot if needed. This level of support stood out to students and provided them with a sort of safety net that they appreciated. This safety net allowed participants to feel more comfortable trying new things and making mistakes. Respondent 183 (M–W) spoke specifically about the value of making mistakes when he shared, "The institutional support of the program, but also…being an intern, which means it's okay to mistakes, and I feel a little bit more comfortable about it." Respondent 301 (F–W) also remembered, "We encountered a nonprofit leader whose motto was 'Fail. Forward. Fast.' His advice taught me that mistakes and missteps are inevitable, and that is okay—the important piece is to keep moving forward, staying true to your mission." The students then gained confidence as a result of their experiences and often realized they were quite capable of succeeding in their workplace careers, both in DCSI and beyond.

Respondent 369 (F–W) described her experience with support and increasing confidence like this, noting:

> Just such a remarkable people like beyond their careers, beyond what they did professionally, like just who they were, who their hearts were, and that they felt like very invested in me. Whether or not, that was true, I felt that, like that people would take the time to have a coffee or a phone call and to feel to be somebody that you know to be a college kid and to feel seen and to be told, like you, matter and, like someday you can change the world. I feel like I'm getting emotional, but it's like there is no better feeling than that—it's like I had an entire summer of people being like, "We believe in you."

This student, like others, shared the combination of independence and support allowed her to feel empowered by DCSI experiences. Respondent 266 (9F–SOC) stated:

> Early on, being able to actually work with professionals and like figure out what it's like to go in and work every day and have to commute and again having the support of W&M there with me the whole time I didn't have to go it alone and figure that out, you know. When I think back to that I'm like, wow I really didn't have all the skills, yet, but it was fine because I had someone with me the whole time and I do think that the people that I interact with were aware of that as well, and they were very supportive, and it was just a great atmosphere.

Respondent 369 (F–W) shared poignantly, "I had this newfound confidence that I stood a little bit taller, and my shoulders are back a little further, and I was like, yeah, I survived the real world." Because support was not something about which I specifically asked, it is significant how often the topic came up naturally by participants as part of why DCSI was so valuable to them (56 times in 26 interviews). Implications around support is discussed in Chapter 5.

Professional and Soft Skill Development

It was not surprising that professionalism and the development of related soft skills came up consistently in interviews, considering it was such a prevalent theme in the surveys and the top-ranked NACE competency as well. Interview participants enthusiastically discussed the professionalism they developed with comments such as the following from Respondent 304 (M–SOC), who stated:

> [DCSI] really [homed] in on soft skills and I think that's what's something that I feel like is often missing from academic majors and kind of like learning about a program or learning about a career in a completely kind of academic discussion-based learning kind of way. You don't always have the interactions that allow you to kind of develop those you know those core competencies like we were talking about like those types of like

> professionalism and work ethic, and…especially oral communication. I think that is something that so more naturally happens when you were doing experiential learning compared to that kind of academic based environment that classroom-based environment. And I think that's I think for me that's the *why* [emphasis added] in terms of how it why it worked or why I felt more prepared was because DCS I really emphasize the importance of those soft skills…everything that we were learning was benefiting my soft skills in the professional environment.

Students also reported their on-campus experiences had not exposed them to the type or level of use of soft skills as they learned in the DCSI program. Respondent 134 (F–SOC) expanded on her professionalism to me, noting:

> Professionally, I felt prepared. I felt like I understood a lot about the type of leader that I am, the type of work that I wanted to do, the type of contributions I wanted to make in the world. Everything was incorporated in the program…The leadership, of course, was a core part of it. It's the title of my cohort. But then professionalism and critical thinking. Those were all embedded in site visits. It's the internship oversight, required oral and written communication…So, I think it worked because it was built into the culture, and it was regimented.

It serves to reason that direct experiences with and discussion of professional settings would increase participants' soft skills; by exposure and intentional reflection, students are able to recognize and develop their own professionalism. Respondent 41 (F–SOC) shared, "It prepared me like how to navigate in a professional space, how to communicate with colleagues on that type of plane, like how to craft professional like emails even."

Most of what respondents discussed included relatively immediate and short-term professional benefits. Importantly, though, a few participants from the early years hinted at long-term effects as well. One particularly unambiguous and incredible example was Respondent 369 (F–W), who described her incredible career in detail and then told me, "DCSI played a huge role in my in my career and the things that I did afterwards." Respondent 334 (M–SOC) described something similar where, as a direct result of one class speaker, he chose to work at a specific institution for 3 years. When he was ready to leave that institution, he noted:

> [I] did a lot of reflection on that, in part, because of actually probably my experiences with DCSI, and talking with Drew [Stelljes]…took some time off, and then I decided to apply for graduate school and now [I have a new job]. DCSI was 8 years ago, and a lot of the things I learned especially from my internship…I carry over to the current way that I engage with people and do my job.

Furthermore, although DCSI is designed to give students these professional experiences, the value participants placed on learning the workplace etiquette and communication and dress code cannot be underestimated. Respondent 19 (F–SOC), when discussing her first job after DCSI, noted:

> The environment of the office was very similar, so already I was a bit assimilated to that, and I was prepared for what that office life would be like, and what the culture would be like, because I had already experienced it. I'd already lived in D.C. for a summer. I had already worked for the government in some capacity.

She went on to share:

> Working the 9 to 5, and it seems a bit arbitrary at first, but literally just going through the steps of the commute. Ok, you live in your apartment in Arlington. You take the

> commute into D.C. You work 9 to 5. Maybe you have a happy hour afterwards, or some social event. Then you take the metro back. Having already had experience in that, there's less that you have to adjust to because a lot of people when they graduate college and they get their first job, they're kind of overwhelmed because it's not just the job. That's the new thing. It's living on your own, getting used to a new city, like everything would be completely new. So maybe it takes you some time to adjust, but I already had experience in that, so I think it prepared me significantly for the real world after college.

As a result of her internship exposure, Respondent 19 felt more confident going into her post-college career, much the same way the high level of support helped students increase their confidence early on in their first, or sometimes subsequent, jobs.

Communication was a competency of its own, but often came up in conversations about professional skills as well. Respondent 304 (M–SOC) told me:

> This is a professional learning experience, this is an opportunity for me to learn and grow, but this is also an opportunity for me to learn how to communicate effectively and respectfully with people that I don't always feel like I would agree with.

As this quote demonstrated, and for many other interviewees, professionalism not only meant learning office culture, but also the ability to interreact with others in the office.

Communication-specific professionalism came up when participants talked about office meetings, emails, messaging, and presentations. Students not only learned how to communicate effectively as a skill, but also developed the professional nuances around when to communicate and about what. Participants learned by watching others and immersing themselves in the workplace environment.

The other overlap in professionalism came up regarding living as an adult in the city and getting to work. Whether navigating the metro system, budgeting meals on little or no income, or figuring out how to balance a social life after working 9–5, the exposure of just being in D.C. and trying out a professional schedule was eye-opening and impactful for many. The experience removed the guesswork of how it would feel when participants approached their first positions, and left them less anxious about the logistics, again increasing confidence.

Aligning Short-Term Outcomes

Considering DCSI outcomes as outlined in the program logic model (see Figure 1), the findings from survey and interview data confirmed alumni outcomes do align with program intentions. Indeed, the five intended immediate outcomes were all referenced in interviews. The outcomes and a sample of participant quotes in Table 17 demonstrate how DCSI achieved the intended outcomes.

Table 17

D.C. Summer Institute Short-Term Outcomes With Participant Quotes

Outcome	Sample quote	Rate of related codes
Students experience authentic learning	I mean really like lifelong connections that don't even involve business anymore. It sets you on a path. [The internship organization] asked me back for the second summer after DCSI, and then I applied to grad school and got into my dream program…and I really attribute that a lot to DCSI. (Respondent 46, F–W)	$n = 30, f = 154$
Students develop professional skills	I'm so excited and thankful for the program as well, I feel like I learned so much and come back to things that I learned in the Program. (Respondent 359, F–SOC)	$n = 30, f = 163$
Students explore potential careers	I mean probably one of my favorite experiences that William and Mary, and I think it was 10 times better than I would have ever imagined. I know that I definitely was just like I knew I needed to internship I knew that I wanted to be in DC and I felt like I had to be in DC because I was a government major, but I think the program really made me think about different aspects of government anything about education differently and also just developed me as a leader as well, and I was really fortunate to have that space. (Respondent 42, F–SOC)	$n = 30, f = 92$
Students cultivate a personal network	It's become less and less intimidating to kind of just put myself out there and stuff, you know. But the program was like a part of a building block, you know. I don't think it necessarily made me like good at networking, but if I hadn't had that experience with, maybe I wouldn't be quite as like comfortable. (Respondent 205, F–W)	$n = 29, f = 81$
Students connect learning and experience to careers	I think for academics, and this is probably true for many students but, having the academic part on top of the internship part was really helpful with for me for like understanding, where I fit and how into a larger society. (Respondent 359, F–SOC)	$n = 27, f = 78$

Note. Participants were coded by (Gender–Race). F = Female, M = Male, W = White, SOC = Student of color.

The intended DCSI short-term outcomes described in Table 17 came up in a variety of ways, but consistently among participants. The value of developing professional skills through

authentic learning and career management for participants came through in their voices and their positive descriptions of program-related outcomes as a result.

Summary

The quantitative and qualitative findings I have shared in this chapter offer information that has not previously been published on any internship programs and their abilities to increase participants' career readiness in the short term. For DCSI, the intended long-term DCSI outcomes of finding fulfilling, meaningful careers as professionals and creating a strong DCSI alumni base for the program were outside the scope of this evaluation; however, producing career-ready graduates as an outcome of DCSI was the primary evaluation question, and this evaluation indicated that this goal was achieved.

The fifth and final chapter discusses the implications of my findings and offers recommendations for DCSI and other internship programs in higher education. I also share suggestions for further research and areas of additional exploration.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As I evaluated the William & Mary (W&M) D.C. Summer Institute (DCSI) program, I was personally struck by the joy in reconnecting with former students as they looked back fondly on their DCSI experiences. Of course, what remains unknown is if only satisfied alumni responded to the request to participate in this study. It is fulfilling to build a program and see students making academic and career connections and develop career readiness. This program evaluation was a useful tool for considering where DCSI (and similar Study in D.C. programs) could be even more intentional in supporting students and faculty.

Prior to this research, the D.C. Washington Center had inconsistent survey data, no intended outcomes, and lacked any type of assessment process, all of which needed remedial attention. Now, my team and I have already used findings from this evaluation and have upcoming opportunities to share the summary with W&M Washington Center donors and board members. We have committed to undergoing one program evaluation annually and using this feedback as one form of assessment to instill a more data-informed culture. We have updated end-of-program surveys to align with intended outcomes and include perceived career readiness. In short, this experience has helped us positively update our practices in a regular and ongoing way.

Prior to working in higher education, I began my career in a low-income K–12 setting. This powerful experience instilled in me the value of equity in education; now that I am in higher education, and thanks to the W&M doctoral program through which I have progressed, I

recognize how critical it is to dig deeply into data to find inequities and bring them to light. For example, I know most of the high school students with whom I worked in 2002–2006 did not have professional networks to use when they were ready to begin their careers. These students did not have prior generations of college graduates in their families to show them how to prepare for and succeed in a university setting after high school. Even among the self-selected W&M undergraduate population, who proactively took advantage of Study in D.C. opportunities, I was struck by the differences in perceived career readiness between gender and race. The data I collected matter as I use the evaluation findings to make impactful changes for the communities who need them most.

As discussed in Chapter 2, a small amount of existing research has connected student experiential learning and careers, but even less exists connecting internships and career outcomes. My DCSI program evaluation intended to bridge some of the gaps in literature and provide outcome data to see if internship programs align as a high-impact practice (HIP). The positive outcomes affiliated with HIPs were indeed present, as the overall DCSI program deepened learning for participants, and for many, changed the way they thought or acted (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). For example, Respondent 304 (M–SOC) talked about how through DCSI, he grew and changed alongside classmates, and Respondent 125 (F–SOC) talked about developing a sense of humility through DCSI and learning by asking questions. Their growth and developing perspectives on how to approach people and places expanded with the potentially transformative influence of their DCSI experiences (Kinzie, 2012). DCSI enhanced participants' abilities to manage their careers upon graduation (Helyer & Lee, 2014), and allowed them to develop their career competencies and professional skills (Simons et

al., 2012). Internship programs like DCSI have the potential to consistently serve as HIPs for college students and can help students become career ready.

Summary of Findings

The W&M DCSI program increases career readiness for participants. Exposure to professional experiences and opportunities to connect academic theory to practice increased professional skills and confidence. This perception of increased career readiness was especially true for women and non-White students, who reported higher levels of perceived readiness after participating in DCSI than other participants in their survey responses. I also sought to evaluate how participants reported DCSI elements helped in preparing them for career readiness. In general, DCSI participants who reported increased career readiness most valued the community, the program support, the internship itself (ranked as the highest DCSI element in helping develop career readiness), and the reflection (ranked second in helping develop career readiness). For most, reflection seemed to tie the experience all together and lead to the professional skills (ranked as the highest National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE] competency in the survey) they gained and their increased confidence. Oral/written communications, which is closely related to professionalism, and career management, and also aligns to increased confidence, were ranked as the next two highest competencies in which participants developed readiness during DCSI.

The specific questions around which DCSI elements increased career readiness and which competencies they developed varied for each student. Female survey participants perceived they achieved more career readiness from the program than men, and non-White students perceived they achieved more career readiness than White students. In fact, non-White survey participants reported participation in DCSI helped them achieve career readiness to higher

degrees that were statistically significant in digital technology, global/intercultural fluency, teamwork/collaboration, critical thinking/problem solving, oral/written communications, and professionalism/work ethic. Similarly, non-White survey participants also reported that alumni relationship building and professional networking, and opportunities for reflection, were more effective than White participants in developing career readiness to a statistically significant degree (see Table 10). Female survey participants reported alumni relationship building, professional networking, and internship placement were more effective than male participants in a statistically significant way (see Table 11). A comparison of means (see Table 5), however, found no statistical significance in differences of overall career readiness among White men, White, women, men of color, and women of color. Yet, the higher means of women of color (M = 8.56) and White women (M = 7.84) relative to their White male (M = 7.04) and men of color peers (M = 7.80) indicate a need for further study regarding the influence of intersectionality.

Participants in both the surveys and interviews noted how DCSI provided them the opportunity to try and fail with a safety net. That safety net was provided by both the community developed during the program, which so clearly came out as an early theme, and support from program staff, faculty, alumni, and fellow cohort members. The opportunities for reflection were valued by many, but most highly by the leadership and community engagement cohort, who spent a great deal of time reflecting in an intentional way. These opportunities also offered support in a therapeutic way, allowing students to talk through challenges and consider new applications for learned skills. Much in the way D. A. Kolb (1984) considered experiential learning as a cycle whereby learners could reflect and then experiment and learn, so did DCSI participants reflect casually outside of class, building both community and opportunities to try again with a safety net of support beneath them.

Discussion

Employers and graduates benefit when college students develop and can demonstrate the NACE career readiness competencies, just as students perceived they developed through DCSI. The following discussion highlights the value of colleges and employers working together, why developing career readiness through intentional opportunities for reflection throughout college matters, and the importance of equity for students looking to access internship programs. The discussion also explores the role of community in internship programs like DCSI, applications of the integration of learning theory, and faculty development around career readiness and reflection.

Bridging the Gap Between Education and Employment

According to NACE (2022), "For new college graduates, career readiness is key to ensuring successful entrance into the workforce. Career readiness is the foundation upon which a successful career is launched. Career readiness is, quite simply, the new career currency" (para. 2). Considering DCSI as an example of how universities offer students the opportunity to cultivate their readiness, the findings of this program evaluation are useful for higher education professionals. Similarly, "career readiness offers employers a framework for developing talent through internship and other experiential education programs" (NACE, 2022, para. 3). When working in unison, as discussed in Chapter 2, higher education and employers can speak the same career readiness language, and students can benefit from this common definition of college success. However, what is often broadly taught in higher education does not always match what is needed by employers in the 21st century (Savitz-Romer & Rowan-Kenyon, 2020). Colleges must provide more concrete opportunities for students to develop their career readiness, and internship programs are one way higher education can offer students those competencies. An

academic program like DCSI provides a mixture of content, time to apply learning, and a means to build professional skills, which provides a ripe, concrete environment for developing career readiness among college students. This program evaluation found that study participants held value in working in a professional setting during their internships. Indeed, professionalism was the highest rated NACE competencies the participants felt they accomplished during DCSI. Interacting with employers in their internships also provided participants a way to increase their network.

As Toner (2019) described, graduates and employers alike look to find professional goals achieved. As a result, some university personnel have begun connecting study abroad experiences with careers skills, the closest HIP match to internships that has been researched; yet alignment between internship programs and study abroad outcomes has not been documented. This program evaluation suggested, as Barber (2020) also found, the DCSI internship program allows students the integrate their learning and benefit of increased career readiness, potentially leading students to find success in life beyond graduation.

Developing Career Readiness Through Reflection

As discussed in the existing literature, universities looking to offer a clear return on investment for students must demonstrate their graduates are career ready and employable (Hora et al., 2020). Given internships are a HIP, I asked participants to identify what they found as effective DCSI practices. This program evaluation found the DCSI internship experience, paired with community and support and regular reflection, is effective in developing overall career readiness. Professionalism in particular allows students to build career readiness. My evaluation did not consider a career readiness pretest as a mean of comparing perceptions before and after

participation in DCSI; thus, it remains unknown how career ready students felt at the beginning of DCSI relative to the end.

As I also observed, higher education, compared to K–12 education, can be slow to change. Faculty are hired as subject matter experts, not as experienced educators; yet faculty members skilled in experiential learning can help students develop career readiness. Providing development opportunities for all faculty to serve as more than just topical and theoretical authorities would help enhance student learning. DCSI faculty work closely with W&M Washington Center staff, and this interaction provides an opportunity to build in training in experiential learning pedagogy so they may, for example, include reflection in their curriculum in an integrated way. The future of higher education may indeed depend on how career ready students feel. Higher education professionals can help students gain readiness through connected experiences. As D. A. Kolb (1984, 2015) outlined in his experiential learning theories, reflection will likely allow students to realize those connections and applications mean readiness.

Participants in this evaluation commented on the value they received due to engaging in reflective practice. D. A. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model holds reflection as one of its pillars, and this model is not static. Students progress through the cycle repeatedly; for example, by reflecting multiple times throughout an internship program, students may be able to make deeper connections and even strengthen metacognition by doing so (M. Harvey et al., 2016). They have time to reflect on content knowledge from the course (e.g., abstract conceptualization), reflect on this learning, apply their learning in their internship (e.g., active experimentation, concrete experience), and then reflect on how their learning influences how they approach the internship as it proceeds. Formal opportunities to reflect through DCSI are complemented by the more casual and organic occasions when students share and discuss

experiences and, when combined, have the power to enhance both learning and career readiness in competencies like professionalism. Even outside of DCSI, reflective practice can be incorporated into academic and curricular programming with benefit to the student who can more regularly connect college experience to potential careers. For example, when students return to the main campus after the completion of the internship, they can reflect on how their summer experience influences how they engage in course work and cocurricular experiences.

The Importance of Equitable Access

Issues of equity will continue to matter greatly when it comes to accessing opportunities that develop career readiness. As noted in this evaluation, women and students of color survey respondents perceived higher benefits as a result of participating in DCSI; thus, removing barriers to participation is a first step in improving access to internships. In this program evaluation, I highlighted quantitative data that noted significant differences in perceived career readiness for students based on race and gender. However, during the 30 interviews, students did not articulate a difference in experience to corroborate the survey findings. The DCSI alumni with whom I spoke were largely positive and felt their DCSI experiences were overwhelmingly valuable, regardless of demographic differences. As the interview protocol (see Appendix F) indicates, I did ask participants about their perceptions of DCSI accessibility. Many recalled financial barriers or the limitations of the three institute topics, but again, my data did not support significant differences in perception between the variables. Furthermore, my study was not designed to explore the reasons why students did not participate in DCSI, which can be a topic for future study.

Despite the statistically significant positive effects of DCSI for women and students of color in their survey responses, little information on access or differences in the scope of

acquiring career ready skills was noted; however, the quantitative data signal that something likely happens, and the intersectionality of various elements of students' identities must be further explored to determine reasons behind the differences found. Regardless, and confirmed across my literature review, equitable access to internship programs has been and remains important both for students of color and from a socioeconomic standpoint.

The Role of Community

The value participants placed on the community they experienced in DCSI highlights that programs like DCSI that use a cohort model can contribute to learning and retention. Certainly, students can work in an internship on their own without any institutional or cohort support. But for DCSI students who participated in this program evaluation, community mattered. Beachboard et al. (2011) discussed the idea of belonging and the power of connectedness for student learning in higher education. Tying this idea of community and connection back to Kuh's (2008) HIPs, Beachboard et al. (2011) proposed:

> Learning community participation should be considered among those high-impact activities. This is particularly the case if program developers are interested in helping students sharpen their ability to work with others in solving complex, job-related problems, because we found that cohorts influenced job preparation more than the other outcomes. (p. 870)

Intentionally building community for internship programs can be a powerful factor for participants and a perhaps a feature that would entice students to enroll and help retain them for the duration of the program. All the participants in the qualitative interviews commented on the role community played in their learning and this finding can help internship directors intentionally build in opportunities for community development.

The Integration of Learning

Like the role of community in an internship program, the impact of integrating learning (Barber, 2014, 2020) and the resulting benefits cannot be underestimated. Barber (2014) defined the integration of learning as:

> Integration of learning is the demonstrated ability to connect, apply, and/or synthesize information coherently from disparate contexts and perspectives, and make use of these new insights in multiple contexts. This includes the ability to connect the domain of ideas and philosophies to the everyday experience, from one field of study or discipline to another, from the past to the present, between campus and community life, from one part to the whole, from the abstract to the concrete, among multiple identity roles—and vice versa. (p. 593)

DCSI provides intentional opportunities for students to integrate their learning. The academic portion of the program provides a common basis for students as they move into their unique internship experiences. As noted previously, the opportunity for reflection provides a tangible way to make learning connections for students, and the internship gives students a way to apply what they learn. The strong role of community in DCSI, as indicated in the qualitative portion of this study, builds in additionally opportunities for students to make sense of what they experience. Further integration of learning may occur once students return to campus as they take part in their academic programs and in cocurricular activities.

Because a pretest was not provided to participants when they started their DCSI program, it remains unknown just where students made connections and how they might have integrated their learning before and after the DCSI experience. Incorporating intentional follow up in academic programming could help students make and strengthen connections between the

internship to the academic setting back on campus. Understanding more about the points of connection for students as they integrate their learning can contribute to future adjustments to DCSI to allow for opportunities for integration.

Furthermore, though there were no statistically significant differences between perceived career readiness based on year of participation (i.e., 12 years ago versus 3 years ago), my qualitative findings suggest for some DCSI participants, the learning and readiness they gained in DCSI compounded over time. I did not study the long-term impacts of DCSI, but some interview participants did allude to career paths and decisions that were highly influenced by people and experiences during DCSI.

Faculty Development

As I discuss further in the next section, the role of faculty development both in and outside of internship programs is worth further exploration. I recommend internship program faculty become trained in experiential learning pedagogy and note that faculty throughout an institution could benefit students by including career discussions in all of academia. The potential impact a university could have on students' career readiness would compound if every course included even a brief opportunity to reflect and make personal academic–career connections. In fact, the Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions (n.d.) is considering just that opportunity. The Center's "newest initiative is a comprehensive approach to embedding career readiness across a college students' entire experience" (para. 1) and features codirector, Matthew Hora. Career-related programming does not have to be limited to student affairs or career centers. Check-ins with students and built-in reflection are simple ways to help students integrate their learning and faculty do not need special training, just a commitment to a broader approach to career readiness. Because many of the students in this study commented on

the value of applying their learning to real-world settings for the first time, it is critical to find other opportunities during their college years for them to engage in experiential learning. Recall Respondent 304 (M–SOC), who shared the opportunity to develop professional skills was "something that [he] feel like is often missing from academic majors."

Faculty could include the NACE (2019) competencies on their syllabi and have students consider them once at the beginning and again at the end of the course to reflect on their development. Another example might be for each academic department to work with a career center and briefly share career opportunities related to the content they teach and in which they are already experts. If one of the goals of higher education is to prepare graduates for the workforce, it is the job of institutional personnel to explicitly and directly help students make connections and consider their career readiness. Providing opportunities for faculty to develop expertise in experiential learning strategies and integration of learning is needed to make this type of change in courses.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Hora and colleagues (2020) argued that little study has occurred regarding if internships are a valued HIP by students, and my findings point to the fact that DCSI graduates indeed found great value in their experiences and felt they were career ready as a result of the program. The following recommendations for policy and practice are a result of both quantitative and qualitative data from DCSI survey analysis and interview coding.

The themes found offer direction for current and future internship programs in higher education settings or beyond. A number of implications for policy and practice emerged, including: (a) the importance of providing quality support and opportunities for community building, (b) the value of training faculty in experiential learning theory and appropriate

pedagogical approaches to teaching, (c) the necessity of equal access to internship programs, and (d) the usefulness of more robust career readiness survey data.

The changing role of higher education as it relates to career readiness in a post-pandemic context is important to note, as the nature of has continued to change. Remote work opportunities, hybrid work environments, and expanded skill sets will contribute to what employers need in career ready graduates. The findings from my evaluation point to factors students found most valuable in their career readiness. Importantly, my survey and interviews occurred 2 years after the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic, so study participants may have been influenced in their responses based on their new work contexts. Individual internship programs, employers, and universities across the United States must pay attention to the increasing role that internships are likely to have for students. Implications for all parties could be significant, and those who are intentional in their efforts to support students' career readiness may see a great return on their investment.

Faculty and Staff: Provide Support and Community

The extensive discussions around the importance of the individualized and significant levels of support DCSI participants received from W&M Washington Center staff and faculty left no question about how valuable support is to students. In fact, of the six examples of negative experiences, five were based on not feeling supported enough. For 87% of the interviewees, support was so fundamental to their quality DCSI experience that they brought it up without any prompting, as I did not specifically ask about support in the interviews.

Relationships between students and W&M Washington Center staff develop before, during, and even after DCSI. I assume relationships are part of a larger factor in the positive feelings of support. When a staff member introduces a student to an internship opportunity that is

handpicked for them because the staff member listened and learned to hear the student's dream experience, that student feels supported, and they remember that care. Such a level of personalized help and encouragement may also go a long way in helping students increase their confidence and willingness to try new things.

Because the participants found great value in the community they developed in classes and outside of classes, it is important to consider ways in which faculty and staff can prime students on skills to build community and engage in ongoing reflection. The learning students do during their internship connects to their prior experiences, their current internships, and their future classes. Building a community and support system to amplify the ability of students to integrate their learning is important.

As institutions develop internship programs with individualized support systems in place, it will be challenging to scale them as interest increases and universities look to meet growing need. I encourage internship practitioners to keep advising and support personal, despite the high level of staffing required. Internships alone are not why students found increased career readiness through DCSI. Support and community throughout the program played a large role.

Faculty: Training in Experiential Learning

Faculty approach to pedagogy matters. DCSI faculty are integrated into the larger internship program. The courses faculty offer for DCSI are not standalone curriculum credits, but rather are designed to help students make connections between theory and practice. The students who had especially strong connections with their faculty still remembered and talked about the academic elements of DCSI. Those faculty included Drew Stelljes, who has taught with DCSI longer than any other faculty, and whose leadership and community engagement students represented the majority of DCSI participants. Participants noted Stelljes spent time intentionally

reflecting with students and teaching them how to consider differing perspectives and experiences through new lenses, offering the students a consider opportunity for growth. Students of Stelljes mentioned his name more than any other faculty member as he employed strategies for experiential learning, including the role of reflection. The self-selection of participants based on a positive DCSI experience may have contributed to this outcome. Faculty are trained in their disciplines versus in teaching pedagogy; thus, faculty require development to learn how to effectively engage in experiential learning and to employ reflection practices that contribute to opportunities for metacognition for students. A policy outlining faculty development requirements for faculty desiring to teach in DCSI would be a first step.

Students: Increase Access to Experiential Learning

Although not studied in detail through this program evaluation, I visited the topic of inequitable access to internship programs throughout my research and writing. Institutions of higher education must address the need for access to quality programs for all students. Grants and scholarships are a first step to increasing access, but more must be done. Funding matters to provide increased access to internships for students and building in additional financial support for lost wages while interning and creating a culture where paid internships for all is standard practice can ease the burden for low-income or first-generation students to access opportunities. Given 30% of the DCSI students I interviewed were Pell-recipients, it became clear that some low-income students were able to make internship opportunities work, and they were able to reap the benefits.

The aspect of paid internships is at the forefront of national conversations. Although outside the scope of my study, the recent debate on paid versus unpaid internships is relevant. My findings highlight the value students receive during their internship experiences and

reinforce the idea that paid internships are an important element in creating equity in accessible internship programs. An unpaid internship is likely to eliminate many qualified candidates from applying as they do not have the means to support themselves or even their families if their time is spent working without compensation. While universities consider scholarships and subsidies to support students, employers should also find ways to pay interns, whether or not they receive academic credit. In the future, the DCSI program coordinator can work to track which internship experiences are paid versus unpaid, and the program can consider the impact that might have through a future evaluation.

Higher education professionals must increase internship program opportunities—not just for students at elite institutions, but for students across the country at institutions on every level. All students deserve to participate in what may likely become an essential practice and part of one's college experience. Career readiness (as may be developed through an internship program) is not just an option anymore, but an increasing expectation that colleges guarantee to graduates.

Career Centers, Employers, and Institutions: Career Ready Graduates

As I sought to compare my DCSI data with those of the larger W&M student population during the 2010–2019 timeframe, I learned university data on graduates are limited. Career center data are focused on acquiring jobs, not on perceived career readiness. Earning a position is not the same as being prepared or ready for that position. For future university surveys, I would encourage career centers to include questions that align with NACE career readiness competencies. I am told, in fact, the W&M is looking to edit the current survey to include such additions. Career readiness data on individual institutions of higher education are useful for units like admissions, but findings could also be valuable to current faculty and employers.

This program evaluation contributes to the literature on career readiness and highlights the need for further study. Collecting additional survey data on readiness is a great start, but in a post-pandemic time, the nature of work has changed. Remote internships and positions, hybrid settings, and increased reliance on technology for communication are all still relatively new realities for many. Employers should collaborate with colleges and universities as they think about career readiness for their students and what new requisite skills and competencies are required in today's workforce. Adaptability, flexibility, and innovation are skills that were needed in pandemic times and will continue to matter as the workplace still responds and shifts in the wake of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Currently, these competencies are not included in the NACE (2019) listing. More career fields than ever are likely to expect a level of technological fluency not previously required. Effective communication similarly matters more than circumstances when the work environment is spread out or virtual. Higher education has an opportunity to shine by helping students develop necessary skills and encourage students to intentionally connect these skills to their career readiness.

Notably, employers will see the participants in this evaluation ranked their readiness in the competencies of digital technology and global fluency lowest. Future studies on employer perspectives of readiness would be an important addition to this research, especially given the use of technology and increased technological expectations that arose during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The global implications of the COVID-19 pandemic similarly provide an interesting backdrop against a lower readiness in global fluency. Because my evaluation looked at DCSI from 2010–2019, none of the conversations included pandemic-related experiences, but some interview participants did reference how the COVID-19 global pandemic impacted their current positions and related work. Employers may want to be prepared for students who are not

as ready to contribute regarding technology and global thinking; however, if employers are interested in helping students develop readiness in technology and global fluency, such support would serve their interns well and help them on their path to full-time employment postgraduation. Internship programs can make a considerable effort to address these competencies as well by including technology into the coursework and global connections into the content. Faculty in particular have a role to play in helping students develop the necessary skills they need in these areas. Faculty efforts that address these gaps and help students reflect on their development to see increased readiness would be valuable.

W&M leaders can find implications from this evaluation study, and I hope these findings may be useful to discussions on the role of experiential learning in higher education and future internship program direction in general. At W&M, there is much discussion and planning around academic credit for internships and the need to institutionalize definitions of experiential learning as it relates to coursework. A newly formed committee on what internships at W&M look like complements the career pillar in the institution's current strategic plan, which will help focus the work the university does in this area. My evaluation findings on the varying levels of career readiness by gender and race, along with the focus on reflection and community and the professionalism developed, will be useful in the conversation. If W&M intends to scale internship programs like DCSI, structures to maintain the elements that matter most will be critical, as standalone internships may not offer as much support to students in their journeys to career readiness and even feelings of fulfillment.

Recommendations for Future Research

I offer five recommendations for future research as a result of this DCSI program evaluation. The first recommendation is to reconsider the newly updated NACE (2022) career

competencies along with more program evaluation strategies. The second recommendation is to study students' perceptions of networking. The third is to research the impact of intersecting identities on career readiness. The fourth is to examine the effects of DCSI on postgraduation jobs, and the fifth and final recommendation is to investigate the long-term career benefits of internship programs like DCSI. These recommendations are described in more detail in the following section.

Consider Updated Career Competencies

After my program evaluation began, NACE updated their career competencies (NACE, 2022) in small but important ways (see Table 18).

Table 18

NACE Core Competencies of Career Readiness, Old Versus New

Original competency	Updated competency
Digital technology	Technology
Global/intercultural fluency	Equity and inclusion
Leadership	Leadership
Teamwork/collaboration	Teamwork
Critical thinking/problem solving	Critical thinking
Career management	Career and self-development
Oral/written communications	Communication
Professionalism/work ethic	Professionalism

Note. NACE = National Association of Colleges and Employers.

I kept my work consistent with the older NACE model, but my survey work in particular would likely be enhanced and modernized by considering the new competency definitions, especially for the new technology and equity and inclusion areas. These areas are increasingly important, were ranked lowest in my work, and have been updated to include a broader interpretation. Technology would also be an interesting area to explore more deeply because of

the rapid pace of growth and specialized specific software needs across industries. University–employer partnerships to determine needed skills and develop training programs to provide them may be a model worthy of exploration.

As the new competencies are explored, additional strategies for DCSI program evaluation would also be useful. Although not used between 2010–2019 (i.e., the time period I studied), the current DCSI internship reflection course offers students a pretest on their perceived career readiness in each of the competencies. This step and the subsequent findings can more clearly link the role that DCSI plays versus what other factors might contribute to perceptions of career readiness now and in the future.

Networking as Relationship Building

Next, for DCSI students who participated in this evaluation, alumni and professional networking turned out to be quite different from community and even relationship building. Alumni relationship building and professional networking was the lowest ranked program element, whereas the value of community and cohort relationships was the top theme. Although I consider networking to be, at its core, relationship building, students did not seem to perceive that opinion. Based on my time teaching in D.C., I argue the distinction is based on the term *networking* and the perceived ingenuine conversations and even salesmanship that students feel professional networking requires. Students shared with me that networking seems transactional and insincere, but I counter that networking just means getting to know people and listening to their stories while sharing personal accounts and keeping in touch. More research could be done in this area to help determine the distinction and present possible solutions to help students embrace networking as a valuable and earnest opportunity to build community.

Intersecting Identities

As university settings increasingly support and encourage students to bring their authentic selves—complete with their many intersecting identities—to their everyday lives, it becomes important to consider how those identities influence perceptions of career readiness. Although I considered differences between race, gender, and other demographics, I did not specifically explore intersecting identities as any subgroup. Perceptions of career readiness by students and employers who hire them may vary even more significantly for those with multiple underrepresented identities. The impact of intersecting identities, including gender identity, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, class, and others, on career readiness could be studied in the future.

Postgraduation Jobs as a Direct Result of DCSI

Although the W&M Washington Center understands anecdotally that DCSI students are occasionally hired by their internship institution after graduation, no formal data exist around rates of employment. We have similarly heard from students that they sometimes attribute postgraduation positions to DCSI experiences indirectly (i.e., through a mentor or other DCSI network contact) but do not have quantifiable data on such connections either. One poorly executed and highly qualitative survey was conducted with Study in D.C. alumni back in 2017 that intended to explore this question in a more concrete way, but it fell short of producing any useful results. A fresh study to better understand how many DCSI graduates are hired by the institution for which they intern would be a useful tool.

Job Happiness and Satisfaction

Finally, beyond the scope of my study, but worth considering for the future, is the idea of job placement happiness and satisfaction in career choice as a result of early postgraduate

readiness. It would be valuable to consider if students who perceive high levels of career readiness—as a result of internship programs or not—achieve higher job satisfaction and career fulfillment after graduation. Such data could be valuable in college recruitment, as would a study of more long-term career benefits of internship programs.

Program Evaluation Next Steps

This program evaluation surfaced several areas that inform future practices and highlighted ways in which to improve future program evaluations of DCSI. The following list includes takeaways from this evaluation:

- Incorporate a pretest survey when students enter the internship program to build a more robust evaluation. A posttest survey can be administered at the conclusion of the program to document the change in career readiness and competencies that are attributable to the program. This step can more clearly link the role of the program has on career readiness versus what other factors outside the program might contribute to feelings of career readiness.
- Additional work could also be done through a mixed-methods evaluation to consider how the quantitative data inform the qualitative or vice versa. The program evaluation completed for DCSI did not overlap those data methods in an intentional way. The quantitative data highlighted some difference in certain demographics, as discussed, but the intersectionality of identities for many students makes it impossible to view data points as single binaries. As a result, my qualitative and quantitative findings did not corroborate perceived differences in career readiness for gender or race, but a future study could approach this focus differently.

- In looking to make DCSI more accessible, it is important to begin tracking how many of the internships in which students are placed are paid. Additionally, it is important to explore what students perceive as barriers to participating in DCSI and why they opt not to apply. Understanding better who current students are and who does not enroll can help improve programming.

At the W&M Washington Center, this program evaluation will serve as a prototype to evaluate DCSI again in the future along with other Study in DC opportunities. Underway already are a number of changes and improvements to programming as a direct result of these findings. Among the updates are: (a) clearly identified and articulated program outcomes, (b) end-of-program evaluations that measure the outcomes and perceived levels of career readiness, (c) increased access to programs through scholarships and intentional outreach to more students of color, and (d) courses specifically focused on reflection and making connections between the internship experience and careers or lives after W&M. The newer pretest instrument piloted in Summer 2022 will continue to be used in the DC Semester Program as well. Existing internship supervisor assessments conducted during and after the students' experiences are valuable, but impact can be increased by intentionally considering D. A. Kolb's (1984) learning cycle and highlighting opportunities to reflect upon and experiment based on the feedback. All of these updates and more can more explored and considered along with tracking for long-term DCSI effects.

Conclusion

My DCSI program evaluation considered how program alumni perceived their participation, specifically DCSI program elements of internship, academics, alumni/networking, and reflection, helped them achieve career readiness. This evaluation found DCSI students who

participated in the survey and interview overall perceived an increase in their career readiness as a result of their participation. They perceived the biggest increase in their competency occurred in professionalism, followed by oral/written communication, career management, and critical thinking/problem solving. Participants perceived the lowest increase in digital technology competencies, followed by global/intercultural fluency. Women and students of color who responded to the survey perceived higher levels of readiness overall and in multiple career competencies than their male and White counterparts. The internship was noted as the most helpful program element in developing career readiness, followed by the opportunities for reflection. Participants found the greatest value in the communities they developed through the program's cohort model, the support they received from staff and faculty, the increased confidence they established, and the professionalism they developed. Students of color and women in particular most valued the opportunities for reflection, more so than their White and male counterparts.

The findings represented in this study reinforce the importance of internships as an important HIP in higher education and point to the need to integrate internship programs into curricula. This evaluation similarly emphasizes the need for universities to increase access to internship programs for all students, especially women and students of color. Access should not be hindered by socioeconomic status nor other limiting factors. In fact, first-generation and low-income students may similarly benefit in increased ways by participating in internship opportunities. As schools such as W&M look to expand internship opportunities and bring programs like DCSI to scale, it will be important to fully fund the cost of participation and potential lost income, along with the necessary staffing to support all students in the individualized way that can be so effective for increasing career readiness.

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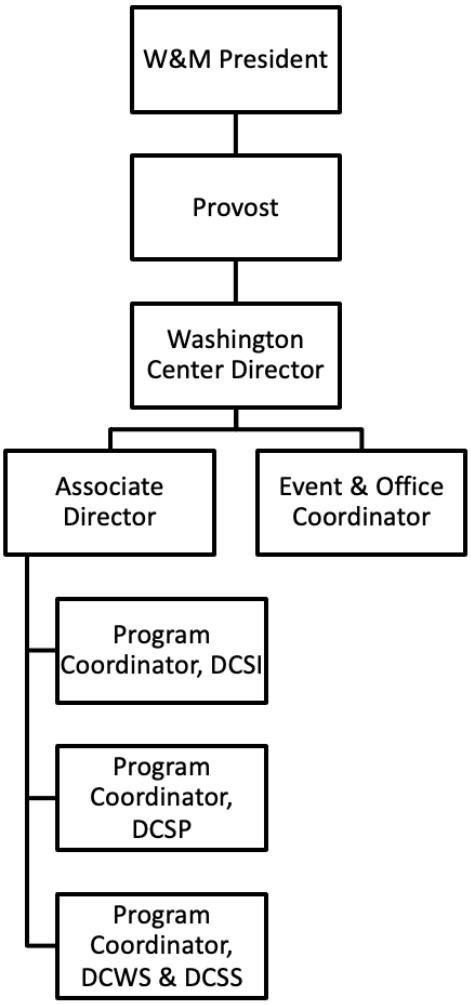
APPENDIX A

W&M WASHINGTON CENTER ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



APPENDIX B

EVALUATION AND SURVEY/INTERVIEW ALIGNMENT CROSSWALK

- *Primary evaluation question*: How are DCSI alumni reporting their participation in the internship-based program helped them achieve career readiness?
- *Subquestion 1:* How does the internship help them achieve career readiness?
- *Subquestion 2:* How does the faculty-led academic connection help them achieve career readiness?
- *Subquestion 3:* How do alumni relationship building and professional networking help them achieve career readiness?
- *Subquestion 4:* How does the regularly guided reflection help them achieve career readiness?

Question	Primary Question	Subquestion 1	Subquestion 2	Subquestion 3	Subquestion 4	Survey Questions Aligned with Literature from NACE
Biographical and Background Questions	Asked for demographic and baseline analysis					"Career readiness is the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace" (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2019, p. 1). The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE; 2019), put forth eight core competencies of career readiness: critical thinking/problem solving; oral/written communications; teamwork/collaboration; digital technology; leadership; professionalism/work ethic; career management; global/intercultural fluency. (p. 1)
Survey Q1: How much did participation in DCSI help you achieve career readiness?	X					
Survey Q2: How much did participation in DCSI help you achieve career readiness in each of the following career competencies? (listed out with scales)	X					
Survey Q3: How did DCSI help you apply what you learned in your academic coursework to real-world problems?			X			
Survey Q4: How helpful were the following program elements in helping you achieve career readiness? (listed out with scales)		X	X	X	X	
Survey Q5: Describe what prepared you most for your first position	X	X	X	X	X	

postgraduation from William & Mary.						
Interview Q1: DCSI was ___ years ago for you. What are some of your memories from that experience? Why did you decide to do DCSI? What motivated you? What stands out from your participation —people, topical content, visits, epiphanies?						
Interview Q2: From the survey you indicated your first job was ___. Is that right?	X					
Interview Q3: Can you please describe for me how you felt prepared for your first job after the experience you had in DCSI? How did you feel the DCSI helped support your undergraduate major? What type of connections did you make in your DCSI major to coursework when						

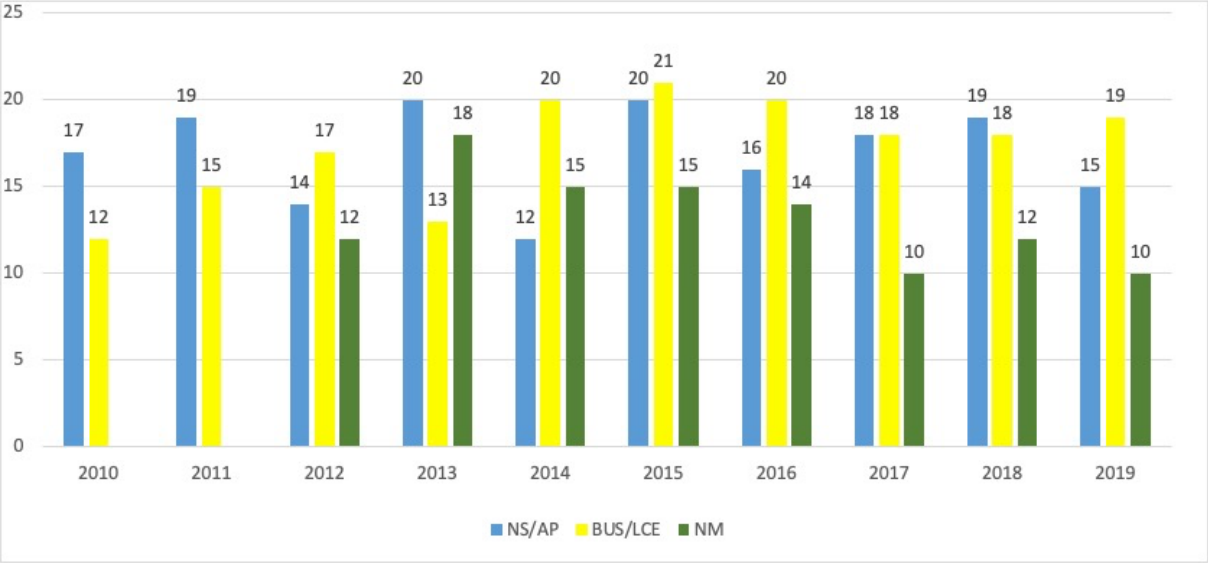
you went back to the W&M campus?						
Interview Q4: As you think back on DCSI, which program elements (in any) felt most powerful in helping you develop your career readiness? (Probes below)		X	X	X	X	
Probe 1: Did, and if so *how* did, the internship help you achieve career readiness?		X				
Probe 2: Did, and if so *how* did, the faculty-led academic connection help you achieve career readiness?			X			
Probe 3: Did, and if so *how* did, the alumni relationship building and professional networking help you achieve career readiness?				X		
Probe 4: Did, and if so *how* did, the regularly guided reflection you them achieve career readiness?					X	
Interview Q5: Why do you think these	X	X	X	X	X	

elements were effective in your experience? Can you provide any specific examples? What else prepared you for your career?						
Interview Q6: If you have gone on to additional jobs, did you find that your DCSI experience continued to have prepared you for those positions as well? In what ways or why not?	X					
Interview Q7: If you had a chance to do the DCSI program again, what, if anything, might you do differently? What advice would you give to students enrolling in DCSI this year? What advice would you give to faculty? What advice would you give internship supervisors?	X	X	X	X	X	
Interview Q8: What advice might you give to future DCSI	X	X	X	X	X	

participants about how they could increase their career readiness through the program?						
Interview Q9: How accessible do you feel like DCSI was accessible to all students who wanted to participate? What challenges did you have regarding participation? What challenges do you perceive classmates had regarding participation?	Asked to consider equity					
Interview Q10: In considering the future effectiveness of DCSI in developing career ready graduates, what, if anything, in your experience, should the program consider doing differently?	Asked for formative purposes					

APPENDIX C

DCSI ENROLLMENT



Note. From W&M Washington Center internal report.

APPENDIX D

EMAILS TO DCSI PARTICIPANTS

Email 1

Dear William & Mary DCSI alumnus,

I am writing to ask for your help. As part of my EdD degree, I am interested in understanding the value of internship programs to students and how graduates perceive the programs prepare them for careers. To study this question, I am conducting dissertation research that evaluates the Washington Center's DCSI program. I want to learn more about your experience to determine your perceptions of career readiness when you entered the job market.

In 2 weeks, on (*will include date when finalized*), I will email you with a link to brief survey and invite you to participate. I would greatly appreciate your help in studying this important question. Additionally, you will be given the opportunity to participate in an optional follow up Zoom interview scheduled at your convenience. I hope you considering joining me. Participation in both is completely optional.

Thank you in advance and please let me know if have any questions.

Sincerely,

Roxane O. Adler Hickey

Director, W&M Washington Center

Email #2

Dear William & Mary DCSI alumnus,

As promised, I am writing today to ask for your help. I am conducting dissertation research that evaluates the Washington Center's DCSI program to study the value graduates perceive this internship program helped prepare them for careers. I am interested in learning more about your experience to determine how you perceive the DCSI program helped in your career readiness when you entered the job market.

Would you please consider taking a few minutes to complete this brief and completely optional survey?

https://wmsas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5d2P19PxThjW5iS

At the end of the survey, you will be given the opportunity to participate in an optional follow up Zoom interview scheduled at your convenience. I hope you considering joining me.

Thank you in advance and please let me know if have any questions.

Sincerely,

Roxane O. Adler Hickey

Director, W&M Washington Center

Email #3

Dear William & Mary DCSI alumnus,

This email serves as a reminder if you would like to participate in my research that evaluates the Washington Center's DCSI program. I am interested in learning more about your experience in the DCSI program and to hear about your perceptions of how the program contributed to your career readiness.

Would you please consider taking a few minutes to complete this brief and completely optional survey?

https://wmsas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5d2P19PxThjW5iS

At the end of the survey, you will be given the opportunity to participate in an optional follow up Zoom interview scheduled at your convenience. I hope you considering joining me.

Thank you in advance and please let me know if have any questions.

Sincerely,

Roxane O. Adler Hickey

Director, W&M Washington Center

Email #4

Dear ___,

Thank you for volunteering for a follow up interview with me about your DCSI experience! I look forward to talking with you about how the program helped in your career readiness when you entered the job market.

Would you please sign up for an available slot that fits in with your schedule? https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/RoxanesMeetingCalendar@wmedu.onmicrosoft.com/bookings/s/lgaw9NhezUGmIsG8Bff3kA2

Once you select a time, you will receive a calendar invite with a Zoom link. Thank you in advance and please let me know if have any questions.

Sincerely,

Roxane O. Adler Hickey

Director, W&M Washington Center

APPENDIX E

DCSI PARTICIPANT ELECTRONIC SURVEY

WILLIAM & MARY

CHARTERED 1693

Thank you for participating in this brief and optional survey.

I am writing to ask for your help. As part of my Ed.D. degree, I am interested in understanding the value of internship programs to students and how graduates perceive the programs prepare them for careers. To study this question, I am conducting dissertation research that evaluates the Washington Center's DCSI program. I want to learn more about your experience to determine your perceptions of career-readiness when you entered the job market.

Career-readiness, as defined by National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), is "the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace" (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2019, p.1) The purpose of this survey is to study the following question, "How are DCSI alumni reporting their participation in the internship-based program helped them achieve career-readiness?"

CONSENT

This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. This program evaluation will consider how DCSI alumni are reporting their participation in the William & Mary Washington Center's internship-based program helped them achieve career-readiness. Your participation is critical in this evaluation and the resulting data will be used for my dissertation, which may result in subsequent publications. Please provide your consent for this survey by checking the box "yes" below. This designation and the completion of the survey means that you have consented to the use of this data for this program evaluation. Your name and identification will not be linked to the data responses. If there are any identifiable characteristics that might unmask your identity, results will be aggregated or reported out generically. Your responses will be held in strict confidence and no comments will be attributed to you by name. Your consent also recognizes that your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw participation in this study at any time or decline to answer any question. Any artifacts provided may become part of the permanent research files unless otherwise requested. If you have any questions or concerns about your privacy and participation in this study, please contact the William & Mary Institutional Review Board Protection of Human Subjects Committee. (email: consent@wm.edu phone: 1-855-800-7187). You may also contact me at [redacted]@wm.edu, or my dissertation chair, Pamela L. Eddy at [redacted]@wm.edu.

Yes, I grant my consent to participate in this survey

No, I do not grant my consent to participate in this survey

BIO & BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Full Name

Preferred Name (if different from above)

Preferred Email

Graduation Year

Major

In which summer did you participate in DCSI?

- Summer after First Year
- Summer after Second Year
- Summer after Junior Year
- Summer after Senior Year
- Other (summer after fifth year, after first-year transfer year, etc.)

In what year did you participate in DCSI?

- 2010
- 2011
- 2012
- 2013
- 2014
- 2015
- 2016
- 2017
- 2018
- 2019

What was your DCSI topic of study?

- National Security
- Business
- Leadership & Community Engagement / Community Engagement
- New Media / News & Media
- American Politics

Why did you decide to participate in an internship with DCSI?

What were you hoping to gain from completing the DCSI internship program?

How (and to what degree) did DCSI staff assist you in securing your internship?

Did you feel confident in your preparation for your DCSI internship?

Yes

Somewhat

No

Did you do any other internships as an undergraduate?

Yes

No

If yes, what type of internship/s did you complete outside of DCSI?

What was your first position after graduating from W&M?

In what field was/is your fist job?

What is your current position (if different from first)?

Was/Is your first or subsequent position related to your DCSI field of study? *(Please explain)*

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

On a scale from 0-10 where 0 = not at all, and 10 = completely, please respond to the following question:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How much did participation in DCSI help you achieve career-readiness?

How much did participation in DCSI help you achieve career-readiness in each of the following career competencies?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Critical thinking/problem solving

Oral/written communications

Teamwork/collaboration

Digital technology

Leadership

Professionalism/work ethic

Career management

Global/intercultural fluency

How did DCSI help you apply what you learned in your academic coursework to real-world problems?

On a scale from 0-10 where 0 = not at all, and 10 = completely, how helpful were the following program elements in helping you achieve career-readiness?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Your internship placement

The faculty-led academic courses

The alumni relationship building and professional networking

The opportunities for reflection

Please describe what prepared you most for your first position post-graduation from William & Mary.

If you were to do DCSI over again, what is the most important thing you wish the program would change?

What is the most important thing to keep the same?

Are you willing to participate in a 1-hour follow-up interview?

- No
- Yes

Thank you! If selected, Roxane will follow back up with you to schedule a 1-hour interview at your convenience.

Also, acknowledging that Roxane is the Center director, do you feel comfortable talking with her about your DCSI experience? (If you do not feel comfortable, we can arrange to have another staff member conduct the interview instead.)

- Yes
- No

Thank you for your participation today!

APPENDIX F

DCSI PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- New verbal and recorded consent and confirmation that participant is comfortable with me as the interviewer.
- 1 hr Zoom sessions will be recorded and will cover the following interview questions:

BACKGROUND:

- DCSI was ___ years ago for you. What are some of your memories from that experience?
    - Why did you decide to do the DCSI? What motivated you?
    - What stands out from your participation—people, topical content, visits, epiphanies?
- From the survey you indicated your first job was ___. Is that right?
- Can you please describe for me how you felt prepared for your first job after the experience you had in DCSI?
    - How did you feel the DCSI helped support your undergraduate major?
    - When you returned to campus (if you did), what connections from your DCSI did you find occurred for you?

        Probes:

        - in classes, in extracurricular, in your career planning, etc.?

- For my research on career readiness, I am using the NACE definition: Career readiness is the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- As you think back on DCSI, which program elements (in any) felt most powerful in helping you develop your career readiness?

    Probes:

    - Did, and if so *how* did, the internship help you achieve career readiness?
        - In which competencies, specifically? (critical thinking/problem solving, oral/written communications, teamwork/collaboration, digital technology, leadership, professionalism/work ethic, career management, global/intercultural fluency)
    - Did, and if so *how* did, the faculty-led academic connection help you achieve career readiness?
        - In which competencies, specifically?
    - Did, and if so *how* did, the alumni relationship building and professional networking help you achieve career readiness?
        - In which competencies, specifically?
    - Did, and if so *how* did, the regularly guided reflection you them achieve career readiness?
        - In which competencies, specifically?
- Why do you think these elements were effective in your experience?
    - Can you provide any specific examples?

    - What else prepared you for your career?
- If you have gone on to additional jobs, did you find that your DCSI experience continued to have prepared you for those positions as well? In what ways or why not?

ADVICE & FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS:

- If you had a chance to do the DCSI program again, what, if anything, might you do differently?
    - What advice would you give to students enrolling in DCSI this year?
    - What advice would you give to faculty?
    - What advice would you give internship supervisors?
- What advice might you give to future DCSI participants about how they could increase their career readiness through the program?
- How accessible to you feel like DCSI was to all students who wanted to participate?
    - What challenges did you have regarding participation?

        Probes:

        - Money, fit, major/coursework, etc.
    - What challenges do you perceive classmates had regarding participation?
- In considering the future effectiveness of DCSI in developing career ready graduates, what, if anything, in your experience, should the program consider doing differently?

APPENDIX G

CONSENT LANGUAGE

Survey Consent Language from Qualtrics Form

This survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. This program evaluation will consider how DCSI alumni are reporting their participation in the William & Mary Washington Center's internship-based program helped them achieve career readiness. Your participation is critical in this evaluation and the resulting data will be used for my dissertation, which may result in subsequent publications. Please provide your consent for this survey by checking the box "yes" below. This designation and the completion of the survey means that you have consented to the use of this data for this program evaluation. Your name and identification will not be linked to the data responses. If there are any identifiable characteristics that might unmask your identity, results will be aggregated or reported out generically. Your responses will be held in strict confidence and no comments will be attributed to you by name. Your consent also recognizes that your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw participation in this study at any time or decline to answer any question. Any artifacts provided may become part of the permanent research files unless otherwise requested. If you have any questions or concerns about your privacy and participation in this study, please contact the William & Mary Institutional Review Board Protection of Human Subjects Committee (email: xxxxx@wm.edu phone: 1-XXX-XXX-XXXX). You may also contact me at xxxxx@wm.edu, or my dissertation chair, Pamela L. Eddy at xxxxx@wm.edu.

- Yes, I grant my consent to participate in this survey
- No, I do not grant my consent to participate in this survey

Interview Consent Confirmation via Zoom, Recorded

The Study

This W&M D.C. Summer Institutes (DCSI) program evaluation is designed to study how DCSI alumni are reporting their participation in the W&M Washington Center's internship-based program helped them achieve career readiness.

Why Participate

Studying how you perceive your participation in DCSI helped you achieve career readiness will help the Washington Center see if DCSI outcomes are aligned with program intentions. It will also help refine practices for future students.

The Request

I ask that you talk with me for the next 60 minutes.

Additional Information

Please know that:

• The confidentially of your identifying information will be protected.

• The specific survey responses will be used for the purposes of this study and will not be shared beyond the Washington Center.

• Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

The Consent

Given this information, do you consent to participate at this time?

• Yes to proceed.

Contact Information

If you have questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied with any aspect of this study, please contact the IRB reviewer at xxxxx@wm.edu.

APPENDIX H

A PRIORI CODES

You'll use the NACE listing, items on career readiness from your definition, and real-world experiences based on the components of the program.

CR	career readiness
CT	critical thinking/problem solving, NACE competency
CM	oral/written communications, NACE competency
TM	teamwork/collaboration, NACE competency
DT	digital technology, NACE competency
LD	leadership, NACE competency
PW	professionalism/work ethic, NACE competency
CM	career management, NACE competency
GI	global/intercultural fluency, NACE competency
IN	Internship experience
FA	faculty-led academic connection
AR	alumni relationship building
PN	professional networking
RF	reflection

VITA

Roxane O. Adler Hickey

Education

William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA — January 2023

- Doctor of Education in Educational Policy, Planning and Leadership
- Higher Education Administration

William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA — May 2002

- Master of Education in Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership
- Emphasis in Higher Education

Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA — May 2000

- Bachelor of Arts, English
- Double Major in Education, Secondary and Elementary

Professional Experience

William & Mary Washington Center, Washington, D.C.

- Director, Washington Center — February 2021–Present
- Interim Director — May 2019–January 2021
- Associate Director & Director of Programs — December 2015–April 2019
- Assistant Director — May 2011–November 2015
- Program Director — July 2006–April 2011

Hyde Leadership Public Charter School, Washington, D.C.

- College Counselor — July 2003–June 2006
- Director of Service-Learning — August 2002–June 2006
- Teacher, 10th-grade English — August 2002–June 2003