

**BREAKING THE CYCLE OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM
DESIGNED TO INCREASE COLLEGE STUDENTS' SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL**

A disquisition presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
Abstract.....	viii
The disquisition.....	ix
The Problem.....	1
Literature Review.....	4
Subjectivity in Hiring.....	5
Subjectivity in the Interview Process	6
Affinity Bias.....	7
Building Social and Cultural Capital.....	9
Institutional Level.....	9
Individual Level.....	10
Programmatic Efforts.....	11
College Career Interventions.....	13
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Human Capital Theory.....	15
Cultural Capital.....	15
Social Capital.....	17
Conceptual Framework: Capital and Employability.....	17
A Causal Analysis	20
Improvement Science.....	20
Root Cause Analysis.....	20
Mission of Higher Education.....	22
Career Education is Optional.....	23
Unequal Access to Institutional Resources.....	24
Opportunities to Build Social and Cultural Capital Require Financial Capital.....	26
The Local Context.....	27
Career Center at UNC Asheville.....	28
State and Federal Policies and the Impact on Local Context.....	32
My Professional Role and Positionality at UNC Asheville	33
A Proposed Improvement to Intentionally Share Social and Cultural Capital	35
Driver Diagram.....	35
The UNC Asheville Internship Program.....	38
Primary Program Components.....	39
Financial Support for Students.....	39
Social and Cultural Capital Resources Provided.....	40
Institutional Support for Students and Sites.....	41
Support and Direction for Students and Site Supervisors.....	41
Improvement Initiative Design.....	42
Design Team.....	43
Implementation Plan and Timeline.....	46
Plan.....	47
Do.....	47
Study.....	49

Act.....	50
Data Collection.....	50
Overview of Practical Measures.....	50
Outcome Measures.....	51
Driver Measures.....	53
Balancing Measures.....	55
Process Measures.....	56
Results and Analysis.....	56
Participants.....	57
Students.....	57
Employers.....	60
Internships.....	61
Process Measures.....	61
Weekly Memos.....	62
Participation.....	62
Procedural.....	64
Check-in Questions.....	66
Driver Measures.....	68
Social Capital.....	70
Cultural Capital.....	75
Balancing Measures.....	79
Faculty and Staff Focus Group.....	80
Employer Focus Group.....	85
Outcome Measures.....	89
Pre- and Post-Survey.....	89
Student Intern Final Reflections.....	94
Implications and Recommendations.....	98
Implications of Process Measures.....	99
Implications of Driver Measures.....	100
Implications of Balancing Measures.....	101
Additional Implications.....	102
Recommendations for Future PDSA Cycles at UNC Asheville.....	103
Communication.....	103
Timeline.....	104
Attrition.....	105
Capacity.....	105
Recommendations for Practitioners.....	106
Foundational Knowledge of Graduate Employability Capitals.....	107
Identity Capital.....	108
Psychological Capital.....	108
Commit to High Touch.....	109
Preparation Process.....	110
Check-in Interviews.....	110
Strong Communication.....	112
Outreach to Organizations.....	112
Building Partnerships.....	113

Implications for Policy.....	113
Limitations of the study.....	114
Directions for Future Research.....	115
Conclusion	116
References	123
Appendices.....	130
Appendix A.....	132
Appendix B.....	134
Appendix C.....	135
Appendix D.....	140
Appendix E.....	141
Appendix F.....	142
Appendix G.....	143
Appendix H.....	145

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Overview of Data Collection Tools by Type of Measure.....	51
Table 2. Internship Hours Worked Per Week.....	67
Table 3. Number of Introductions to Professionals.....	68
Table 4. Site Supervisor Check-In Interviews A Priori Codes.....	71
Table 5. Student Intern Check-In Interviews A Priori Codes.....	73
Table 6. Final Reflection A Priori Codes for Student Interns.....	96

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The Five Graduate Employability Capitals	18
Figure 2. Fishbone Demonstrating Causal Analysis.....	22
Figure 3. NACE First Destination Survey for the College Class of 2022	29
Figure 4. UNC Asheville First Destinations for the College Class of 2022.....	30
Figure 5. Driver Diagram Demonstrating Theory of Improvement.....	37
Figure 6. Average Total Income of Household Origin.....	58
Figure 7. Highest Educational Attainment of Parents/Guardians.....	58
Figure 8. Reasons Students Chose to Participate in the UNC Asheville Internship Progra.....	60
Figure 9. What Students Hoped to Get from the UNC Asheville Internship Program.....	90
Figure 10. Primary Outcomes Students Reported in the UNC Asheville Internship Program.....	91

ABSTRACT

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM DESIGNED TO INCREASE COLLEGE STUDENTS' SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

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Western Carolina University (January 2025)

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We have all heard, "it's not what you know, but who you know," a phrase often repeated when referring to the job search process. This disquisition study takes that practical knowledge, grounded in social reproduction theory, to address the challenge of varying career outcomes for college students based on levels of SES. Using current research on the success of internships in improving career outcomes, this study uses improvement science to develop an internship program designed to increase students' social and cultural capital. Utilizing Michael Tomlinson's definitions and measures of graduate employability capitals, this research introduces and tests an internship program at UNC Asheville that colleges can use to intentionally build capacity for greater social capital among college students in the form of shared institutional connections while providing a months-long opportunity for students to begin to build cultural capital related to their intended career field. To reach these goals, the primary components of the UNC Asheville Internship Program were: 1) financial support for students, 2) social and cultural capital resources provided by the college and the employer, 3) institutional support for students and sites during the internship-site matching process, and 4) support and direction for students and supervisors to build graduate employability capitals throughout the internship. The UNC Asheville Internship Program increased students' social and cultural capital and created a model that can be utilized to improve the way that colleges share their institutional resources with students in the service of improving postgraduate career outcomes for students with lower SES.

THE DISQUISITION

The disquisition is formal, problem-based discourse. The disquisition is closely aligned with the scholar-practitioner role of Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) students and thus takes on a practical focus rather than the theoretical focus of traditional Ph.D. dissertations. The purpose of the disquisition is “to document the scholarly development of leadership expertise in organizational improvement” (Lomotey, 2020, p. 5). The Ed.D. program at WCU nurtures and matures students as both scholars and practitioners who are trained to understand systems and institutional challenges and opportunities through a lens of research and scholarship. Students apply their knowledge, using their institutional access and positionality, directly to the educational institutions where they lead. The Ed.D. is an applied degree, and the disquisition is similarly an applied capstone experience for doctoral work. The disquisition at WCU specifically utilizes an Improvement Science methodology, is shaped by critical theory and scholarly research, and engages the candidate in the application of the concepts in an applied manner through the development and implementation of an intervention within their local institution, focused on improvement of equity within that system. Ultimately, the disquisition serves as documentation and assessment of an improvement initiative that “contributes to a concrete good to the larger community and the dissemination of new relevant knowledge” (Lomotey, 2020, p. 5).^[1]

The Problem: Disparate Postgraduate Career Outcomes

We have all heard, "it's not what you know, but who you know," a phrase often repeated when referring to the job search process. The phrase refers to the social networks that individuals have around them that provide access to resources, including information and people. These networks and resources, known as social capital, provide college students with greater access to opportunities throughout the job search process and beyond (Bourdieu, 1986; Museus & Neville, 2012). Bourdieu (1986), a French Sociologist, was the first theorist to formally define social and cultural capital and their relation to financial resources. Bourdieu (1986) defined cultural capital as the cultural markers that associate a person with a particular group and/or level of socio-economic status (SES¹). Cultural capital comes in two forms: embodied and institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1986). Embodied cultural capital includes behaviors and attitudes that convey membership in a group and/or social class, while institutionalized cultural capital can come from earning an educational credential, including a college degree (Bourdieu, 1986). Both social and cultural capital are critical components of the job search process for college students (Hora, 2020; Rivera 2012a).

Increasingly, students pursue college degrees expecting success in their postgraduate job searches and a boost in social mobility (Chan, 2016), which is the ability to move up in social class and SES status. However, recent economic analysis calls into question the efficacy of a college degree in moving graduates from lower SES to higher SES (Chetty et al., 2020). Elite

¹ SES is most often defined by income, education, and occupation (Cowan et al, 2012); research referenced throughout this literature review utilize different thresholds of each aspect to determine level of SES. For the purpose of this study, higher SES is defined as students from families who are more privileged within society with access to more societal resources in terms of income, education, and occupation. Lower SES is defined as students from families with less privilege within society with access to fewer societal resources in terms of income, education, and occupation.

colleges² and only a few non-elite college outliers are more likely to move their lower SES students to a higher SES postgraduate outcome than other colleges (Chetty et al., 2020). The Pew Research Center supported the finding that college degrees do not always provide students with equal access to social mobility, noting that first-generation college students lag behind their second-generation peers in income after graduation, earning significantly less in median family income in 2021 (Schaeffer, 2022). Further, the Strada Institute for the Future of Work and Burning Glass (now Lightcast), published a report on underemployment among college graduates in 2018. The study found that over 40% of college graduates in the United States are underemployed in positions that do not require a college degree and that once underemployment begins, it is highly likely to persist throughout a college graduate's career (Burning Glass, 2018). There is no current national research on how or why some colleges produce better postgraduate career outcomes than other colleges. Social and cultural capital transmission in college may be key factors affecting college students' postgraduate career outcomes and social mobility.

Politicians, students, and students' families expect all colleges to produce strong career outcomes for students. The expectation operates from a skills-to-jobs framework that ignores the impact of social and cultural capital on the hiring process (Holmes, 2013; Hora, 2017). Despite the rhetoric from national politicians expressing the need for higher education to lead to high-paying jobs for students, few policies exist to address postgraduate career outcomes, and no policies recognize the reality of the job search process. The focus of the only two federal policies related to postgraduate outcomes, Gainful Employment and the College Transparency Act, is on providing large-scale employment data and information to students, as consumers, to make better

² Elite colleges are defined by *The New York Times* social mobility index as the 80 American colleges with the most selective admissions practices and include the eight colleges traditionally identified as Ivy League.

decisions on how they spend their educational dollars (Cassidy, 2021; “Issue paper: gainful employment,” 2022; “Gainful Employment”). Both policies operate with the underlying assumption that college degree programs directly lead to specific workforce outcomes. However, employers do not hire on the basis of degrees alone, instead making decisions on which candidates to hire based on network connections and cultural “fit” (Hora 2017; Hora, 2020; Rivera, 2012a). Hiring based on connections and fit privileges college students from higher SES backgrounds who have access to greater social and cultural capital from their family of origin (Hora, 2020; Rivera 2012a; Stuber, 2009). There has yet to be a policy at any level that recognizes that hiring is not undertaken by employment data at the macro-level, but by individual hiring managers, and that college degrees alone do not guarantee employment. Students, especially students from lower SES backgrounds, need their colleges to proactively share institutional connections ³for postgraduate career success to build greater social and cultural capital for all students (Hora, 2020; Martin, 2009), and that is what this disquisition study aims to do through the implementation of a new internship program.

The benefits of internships for postgraduate career outcomes are widely established. Internships are one of the American Association of Colleges and Universities recognized High Impact Practices (AAC&U, 2023) and an internship related to one’s career is a high-impact career practice from the National Alumni Career Mobility Report (The Career Leadership Collective, 2022). Using data from their Job Outlook 2023, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) reported in a press release that employers view an internship as the

³ Institutional connections refer to the relationships between organizations that exist regardless of who is employed. For example, colleges and businesses may maintain partnerships to offer internships regardless of the current Chancellor in office or the current Director of the Career Center. These relationships also extend to alumni who feel an affinity with the college regardless of who is currently employed at the college.

deciding factor among two otherwise equally qualified candidates (NACE, 2023b). The power of internships was also confirmed in a causal experiment in Europe, where researchers sent identical resumes with and without internship experience to open positions and found that those with internship experience received 12% more invitations to interview (Baert et al., 2021). Internships are an established intervention to promote and improve postgraduate career outcomes, but internships also have significant social, cultural and financial barriers preventing students from access, especially students from lower SES backgrounds (Hora et al., 2021). Internships designed to remove barriers to access and build social and cultural capital have the potential to improve college students' postgraduate career outcomes.

The purpose of this disquisition study is to introduce, develop, and test an internship program that colleges can use to intentionally share access to social capital the form of institutional connections while providing a months-long opportunity for students to build cultural capital related to their intended career field. In the following sections, I highlight literature that demonstrates how the hiring process relies on social and cultural capital, an overview of the current ways in which colleges address social and cultural capital, propose a theoretical framework based on social reproduction theory from which to view the problem of college students career outcomes, analyze the problem within my local context of UNC Asheville, define a new internship program to be conducted at UNC Asheville designed to interrupt social reproduction, implement the internship program, and analyze the results and impact of the internship program on gains in students' social and cultural capital.

Literature Review

This section discusses the current literature on how employers choose to hire recent college graduates, finding that networking connections and cultural fit matter in individual hiring

decisions. Based on the findings of how employers hire, the section then reviews the literature on what colleges can do to increase students' social capital and cultural capital in service of postgraduate career outcomes. The literature review leads directly to the theoretical framework section demonstrating that social reproduction most likely has the greatest influence on postgraduate career outcomes across all colleges.

Subjectivity in Hiring

Postgraduate career outcomes directly result from the hiring process conducted by organizations seeking to employ college graduates (Holmes, 2013). Students are not placed in a job by their college when they graduate from a degree program; instead, they must seek employment. Employers have discretion in how, when, and who they hire. Holmes (2013) proposes that “graduate employability can be considered as an always temporary relationship that arises between an individual graduate and the field of employment opportunities, as the graduate engages with the ‘gatekeepers’ to those opportunities, particularly those who make selection decisions” (Holmes, 2013, p. 550). While the outcomes of hiring decisions are widely studied because they can be easily accessed, the process of hiring, which happens within organizations and behind closed doors, is not as easily accessible (Hora, 2020). When hiring, most employers typically screen for the skills needed to complete the job in the application process and then conduct interviews with job candidates to determine fit in the organization (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Holmes, 2013; Hora, 2020; Rivera, 2012a; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). The hiring process has two steps where subjectivity, including bias, and the preference of the hiring manager⁴ determines an applicant's success: application screening and interview.

⁴ I use the term “hiring manager” throughout this disquisition to represent the different titles of the people who conduct the hiring process at organizations. The hiring manager is the hiring decision-maker, ultimately deciding who in the applicant pool will be offered the position.

Subjectivity first arises in the hiring process during the screening of applications. In an interview-based study with 19 employers who hire recent college graduates in the United Kingdom representing organizations of varying size, both non-profit and private, Tomlinson & Anderson (2021) found that employers typically looked for reasons to screen applicants out of the hiring process, due to the high numbers of applicants who met their education and skills-based requirements. In screening resumes, employers looked for cultural signals including familiarity with their organization in the form of an internship, followed by co-curricular experiences that related to the context of their organization, and applicants' ability to articulate their fit with the organization on paper (Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). The graduate's degree alone did not guarantee movement from application to interview.

Subjectivity in the Interview Process

Due to its often entirely subjective nature, the interview stage of the hiring process has the most potential for the hiring manager's personal preference to prevail (Rivera, 2012b). In interviews, candidates are actively screened for fit with the organization, a concept that lacks an agreed-upon definition by hiring managers (Hora, 2020; Rivera, 2012a; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). It is rare for a researcher to gain access to the interview process in real-time, which is why Rivera's (2012a; 2012b) eight-month ethnographic study of the hiring process at top management consulting firms, law firms, and investment banks is a remarkable resource. The interview process is typically studied by researchers through interviews about the process with hiring managers (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Rivera, 2012a; Hora, 2020, Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021).

If interviews are open-ended, instead of using a list of the same pre-determined questions for each applicant, the interview becomes even more of an opportunity for hiring managers to

look for similarities in personality and interests; the focus is less on the skills needed to get the job done and more on the candidate's similarities with their interviewer (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Rivera, 2012a), showing that cultural capital matters in job interviews. For example, in a qualitative study of 42 manufacturing firms in Wisconsin that hire recent college graduates, 74% of hiring managers reported that they hire for cultural fit, but Hora (2020) found that the definitions for the term "fit" change from employer to employer, even within the same industry. Additionally, Chua & Mamanian (2020), through 36 interviews with hiring managers interviewing applicants at top tech firms in Silicon Valley, found that in addition to personal commonalities, hiring managers also looked for behaviors and signifiers of higher social class. At the interview stage, subjectivity in hiring arises when hiring managers use evaluations of embodied cultural capital, behavioral attributes typically associated with people born into higher SES and often referred to as "cultural fit" (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Hora, 2020; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). Embodied cultural capital, gained through both a college degree and an investment in social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), determines the success of the hiring process for an individual (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Hora, 2020; Rivera, 2012a; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021).

Affinity Bias

It is impossible to talk about subjectivity in hiring without acknowledging the way that bias arises in employment decisions. Bias may appear in hiring decisions either implicitly or explicitly and can take the form of discrimination against marginalized groups of people based on race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, attractiveness/weight, and more. As an example of the persistence of bias in hiring, in 25 years, the racist bias against resumes with Black identifiers has not decreased (Quillian et al., 2017). Resumes with Black racial signifiers, "such as a racially

identifiable name,” are screened out at higher rates than those without them (Quillian et al., 2017, p.10870). Rivera's (2012b) ethnographic study found that *lack of polish*, a term undefined by the organization and hiring managers, eliminated candidates from marginalized communities despite elite educational pedigrees. While explicit discrimination is illegal based on Federal Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) hiring regulations (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2023), these examples demonstrate that it still happens.

Not all of the discrimination in hiring is explicit, implicit bias has also been found to play an important role in how hiring decisions are made. Implicit bias was confirmed by Greenwald & Banaji (1995) who found that unconscious perception affects self-esteem, attitude, and stereotypes. In hiring, implicit bias typically takes the form of affinity bias, which is a preference for hiring people who are more like ourselves and Rivera (2012a) confirmed this finding. Through a qualitative study of 120 interviews with hiring evaluators and observation of a hiring committee, Rivera (2012a) found hiring managers who discover they share commonalities with candidates' applications are more likely to screen them forward to the interview.

Because discrimination in hiring has persisted over decades (Quillian et al., 2017), this study of one college intervention cannot effectively propose a change that will lessen the impact of discrimination and affinity bias in hiring. However, McDonald (2011) and Fernandez & Greenberg (2013) do suggest that social capital may have a positive influence on the effects of racism and bias in hiring. McDonald (2011), using a large national survey of social networks based on race and gender, found that the demographics of social networks determine access to social capital and resources related to potential employment. Similarly, Fernandez & Greenberg (2013) reviewed data on hiring at one company for an entire year and found that network referrals made a difference in helping candidates with marginalized identities overcome racial

discrimination at both the application and interview stages. Therefore, the focus of this disquisition study is not on how to overcome affinity bias and outright discrimination, but on the related concepts of social and cultural capital to create an intervention that may provide students with tools to get past the gatekeepers of opportunity in the settings where they want to work.

Building Social and Cultural Capital

The prior section established that hiring is based not just on degrees and skills, but also on social and cultural capital. Building on this foundation, the next part of the literature review explores what colleges can do to address social and cultural capital on campus. The literature in this section focuses almost exclusively on social capital as no literature was found on colleges' programmatic efforts to increase students' cultural capital.

Institutional Level

Building social capital and offering to share institutional connections is impactful and beneficial for students since hiring managers make decisions on more than just an applicant's skills to do the job (Rivera, 2012a; Hora, 2020). Currently, a small amount of research exists on how colleges can improve hiring outcomes given the individual subjectivity of the hiring process and the reliance on both social and cultural capital in hiring (Hora, 2020; Martin 2009). Most of the research on social capital in higher education centers on its impact on building a sense of community for persistence and completion of degree programs, such as tight-knit cohorts of students for support (Cox, 2017; Friend, 2021; Museus & Neville, 2012), and individual/group-level usage of social capital to access institutional resources either before or during college (Destin & Debrosse, 2017; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Museus & Neville 2012). Still, because of the persistent use of social and cultural capital in hiring decisions (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Fernandez & Greenberg, 2013; Hora, 2020; Rivera, 2012a), it is worth exploring what we know

about the use, generation, and benefits of social and cultural capital for college students on an individual level.

Individual Level

On the individual level, institutional connections may be challenging for some students to access based on the complexity and bureaucracy of their college (Moschetti & Hudley 2015; Museus & Neville, 2012). Students who enter college with lower SES typically do not have the same resources in the form of time to pursue social capital as their higher SES peers, often due to the need to work part-time or full-time to afford college (Martin, 2013; Stuber, 2009).

Navigating the complex system of higher education is challenging for students without prior knowledge of how the system works, typically first-generation college students (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). The long-term exposure to their chosen field needed to build social and cultural capital (Hora, 2020) can be more difficult to come by if a student's college does not provide the resources needed to take advantage of that institutional relationship and network building, most often in the form of internships (Fischer, 2022; Martin, 2013; Stuber, 2009).

In interviews with racially marginalized students across four colleges, Museus & Neville (2012) found that having institutional support in the form of an informal mentor makes a difference in students' sense of community and ability to access college resources. Two interview-based studies of lower SES students, one at a community college and one at four-year colleges, found that for students entering college with lower SES and marginalized identities, colleges must make an intentional effort to create access to resources and not rely on students to navigate the college on their own (Friend, 2021; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Both having a mentor and building social connections with peers provide students with a personal way to

access college resources and receive introductions to opportunities offered by the college (Friend, 2021; Museus & Neville, 2012; Stuber, 2009).

Programmatic Efforts

On a programmatic level, colleges may be able to create initiatives to help students increase social capital. The intentional practice, on the part of organizations, of helping students develop social capital can result in strong social networks for students across SES (Cox, 2017; Friend, 2021). One ethnographic study of a successful program that brings students from low-income and racially diverse communities into a highly structured program to intentionally build the social and cultural capital needed to enter elite colleges resulted in high levels of secondary and post-secondary educational success (Cox, 2017). Creating a system where students develop strong relationships with a mentor older than them, while also mentoring another student younger than them, provided access to information and support to successfully navigate elite secondary institutions and gain admissions at elite colleges (Cox, 2017). Cox's (2017) study shows that with intentionality and an emphasis on relationships, organizations can create programs to build the social and cultural capital students need to move from lower SES to higher SES.

Stuber (2009) contributes greatly to the understanding of capitals utilized in this disquisition, finding a circularity in the development of social capital. Interviewing the students twice over three months, Stuber (2009) captured the effects of social and cultural capital: the more social and cultural capital a student enters college with, the more likely they are to be able to use that to build the social and cultural capital that will help them to stand out to employers. Higher SES students utilized social capital in the form of personal ties to access internships and extra-curricular activities, which then helped them to build more cultural capital (Stuber, 2009).

Stuber (2009) interviewed 61 students, half defined as being from upper-middle-class backgrounds (higher SES), and half defined as being from working-class backgrounds (lower SES) about their involvement in the extra-curricular activities offered by their colleges. Stuber's (2009) findings support studies on the effects of building social capital in college: lower SES students were better able to access extra-curricular activities when supported by their institution both financially and with connections, and personal ties generated through friendships on campus provided more information about opportunities and created more confidence to pursue extra-curricular activities (Cox, 2017; Friend, 2021; Martin, 2013; Museus & Neville, 2012).

Finally, only one study looked directly at the relationship between social capital and postgraduate career outcomes. Martin (2009) took a longitudinal look at the use of social capital for postgraduate career outcomes at an elite college and found a difference in how lower SES and higher SES students utilized it. Lower SES students were more likely to use institutional connections and resources to pursue their postgraduate career outcomes, while higher SES students were more likely to use personal and familial connections (Martin, 2009). The focus on how students at an elite college build and utilize social capital for postgraduate career outcomes is at the individual level, with students doing it on their own, and does not include information on specific programmatic efforts for colleges to intentionally share resources. Still, Martin (2009) suggests that we may see that lower SES students are more likely to use institutional connections as they pursue careers after graduation. There is a necessary and missing investigation, and potential critique, of how higher education institutions share social and cultural capital for lower SES students, especially important for institutions that serve more lower-income students.

College Career Interventions

Although the literature studying the institutional resources for students to build social and cultural capital for postgraduate career outcomes is slim, the literature on how hiring managers make decisions provides evidence that both social and cultural capital may be a way to improve postgraduate career outcomes for students with lower SES and/or marginalized identities. Social capital plays a role at the information and application stage and cultural capital plays a role at the interview stage (Hora, 2020; Fernandez & Greenberg, 2013; Rivera 2012a; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). Throughout the literature, three areas arise in which colleges can intentionally intervene on behalf of students to provide social and cultural capital resources that may improve postgraduate career outcomes: 1) access to social network connections for information and referrals (Cox, 2017; Hora, 2020; Fernandez & Greenberg, 2013; Martin, 2009; Museus & Neville, 2012; Stuber, 2009;); 2) access to long-term experiences within their industry of interest via internships primarily (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Hora, 2020; Stuber 2009; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021), and 3) education about the role of cultural fit in hiring (Holmes, 2013; Hora, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021).

The National Alumni Career Mobility Survey (NACM) Annual Report (The Career Leadership Collective, 2022) provides support for the three areas where colleges can intentionally intervene identified in academic literature. The NACM Annual Report released in August 2022 synthesizes survey responses from 9,919 alumni from over 50 public and private colleges of varying sizes and Carnegie Classifications from 2019 through 2022. The survey asked respondents about career pathway preparation, career satisfaction, and perceived economic mobility. After analyzing survey data, the NACM Annual Report recommended six high-impact career practices based on what alumni reported as the practices their college offered that

contributed the most to their current career success. The six areas where alumni reported strong return on investment from their undergraduate degree related to their current career success include: 1) understanding career opportunities, 2) creating a career plan, 3) networking with employers, 4) having an internship related to their current career, 5) receiving helpful career advice, and 6) learning critical thinking skills (The Career Leadership Collective, 2022). The survey also found that “only 47% agreed that their institution helped prepare them for their career and only 21% agreed that their institution invested in their career” (The Career Leadership Collective, 2022, p.5). The results show that there is a disconnect between the programs that colleges provide and what students find beneficial in pursuing careers after college. Graduates recommended relationship-based needs (networking, receiving advice and information) and long-term experiential learning (internships) as keys to their success. These needs are rooted in providing access to social and cultural capital. As demonstrated by the literature, a college-wide intervention is needed to improve postgraduate career outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

Since social and cultural capital are critical to postgraduate outcomes, it is important to understand the origins and definitions of both. Bringing together economic and sociological principles, Bourdieu (1986) offers a theory of social reproduction wherein those with more financial capital seek to maintain their status through the “clandestine circulation of capital” (p. 26) in the forms of social and cultural capital. To better understand the concepts of social and cultural capital and their roles in the reproduction of social hierarchy, in this section, I provide a historic tour of the capitals - human, cultural, and social. Once the background is established, this section ends with a modern update to Bourdieu’s (1986) social reproduction theory offering a new framework from Tomlinson (2017) related directly to college graduate employability.

Tomlinson's (2017) theory of five graduate employability capitals, including a more nuanced definition of cultural capital than Bourdieu's (1986), provides the theoretical framework for a new internship program at UNC Asheville.

Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory can be traced back to as early as 1691 and Sir William Petty who first placed a "money value on laborers" (Kiker, 1966, p. 482). Since that time, human capital evolved in the discipline of economics with economists both reluctant to place a value on human life, but also recognizing the need to formalize the cost-benefit analysis of investing in humanist endeavors including education, medicine, housing, etc. (Kiker, 1966). More modern notions of human capital can be seen in the assumptive value of education in relation to the workforce: the skills and abilities students receive through a college degree are expected to provide employers and graduates a payoff in terms of graduate employability and organizational financial outcomes (Holmes, 2013). Human capital theory, when used to determine career outcomes, is focused solely on a skill-to-job analysis, telling only one part of the story of postgraduate career outcomes, and neglecting to recognize the role of additional capitals. The national conversation on degrees leading to jobs is a direct use of human capital theory alone to describe the labor market.

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986) recognized two forms of cultural capital: the objectified state and the embodied state. The objectified state of cultural capital takes the forms of objects that hold value in elite society: cars, paintings, homes, and more that can be purchased with financial capital and passed down through families (Bourdieu, 1986). The embodied state of cultural capital is a critical component of this disquisition and includes the dispositions, behaviors, and education

valued by elite groups and the upper-middle classes (Bourdieu, 1986). For Bourdieu (1986), the transmission of the embodied state of cultural capital takes years to acquire and typically begins through the family group; the earlier the exposure to cultural capital, the more embodied cultural capital is able to grow. Embodied cultural capital can be easily hidden and mistaken for “legitimate competence” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 18) because elites have supplied the definition of competence around their own cultural values.

The literature review confirmed that employers often use embodied cultural capital as a criterion for hiring (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Hora, 2020; Rivera 2012a), without being able to fully define the precise skills demonstrated in human capital terms. Bourdieu (1986) did not discuss cultural capital in terms of hiring and therefore stopped his analysis at the point of education, where degrees offer a form of institutionalized cultural capital for those born without the ability to invest in the generation of cultural capital from birth. Stuber (2009) bridged education and hiring to infer that capital building creates class oppression in postgraduate career outcomes by sharing the following:

Just as elites have been able to alter the college application process to preserve their advantage by opening it up to judgments of “character” – shorthand for a cultural style (Karabel, 2005)—these analyses suggest that a similar process may extend into the occupational sector. As more young people enter the job market with a college degree, employers may seek new criteria to identify desirable employees. Within the current regime, students from privileged backgrounds may be able to preserve their privilege by displaying cultural competencies that are valued by many employers (p. 897).

Stuber's (2009) assertion that having capital creates the opportunity to build more capital makes it all the more critical that colleges address the growth of capital as a key component to improve postgraduate outcomes for students from lower SES backgrounds.

Social Capital

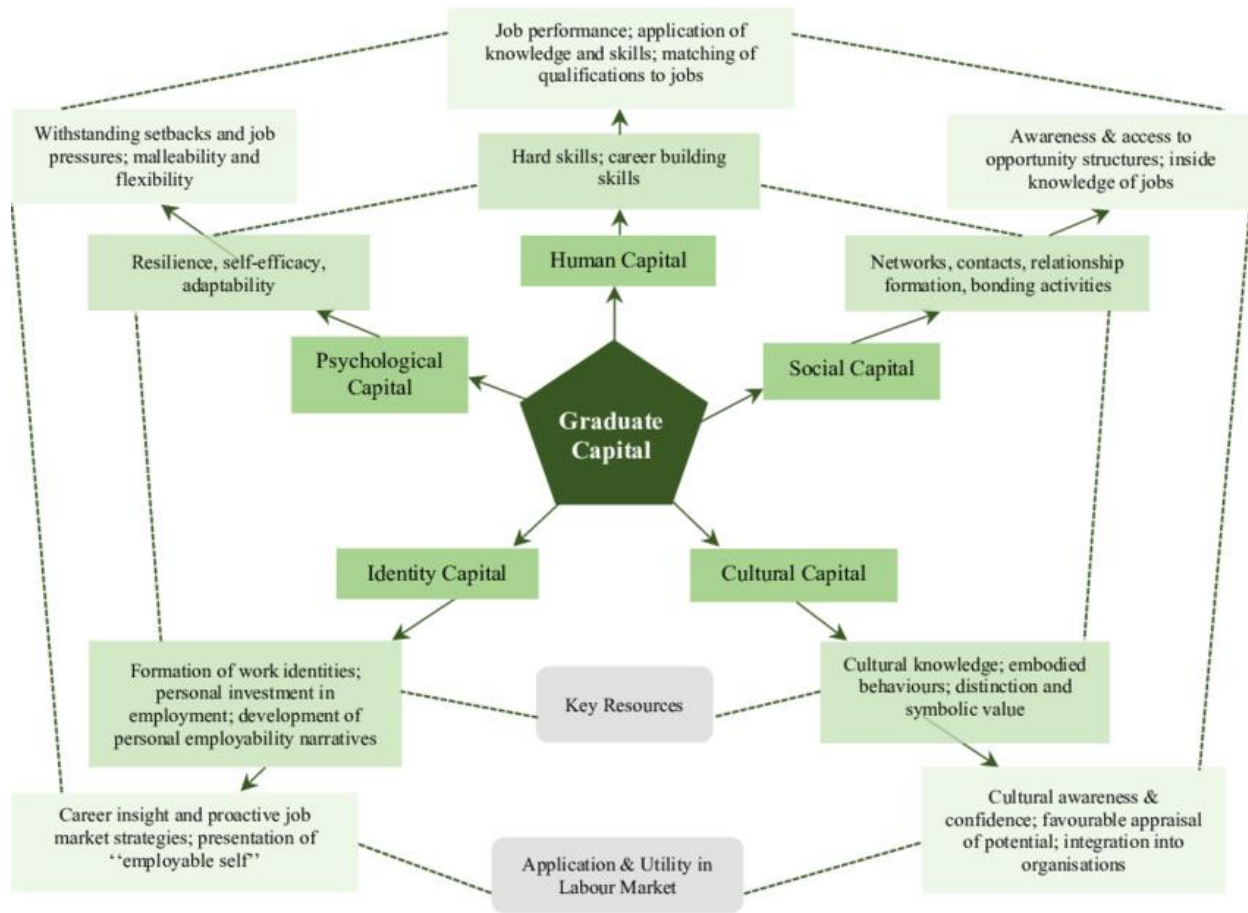
The final concept that Bourdieu (1986) coined is social capital, as it relates to group membership. According to Bourdieu (1986), the value of social capital exists only within relationship exchanges based on group solidarity. Social capital requires constant maintenance: "the reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and re-affirmed" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 22). Through these exchanges and investments in group membership, social capital provides access to information, favors, and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). The definitions of social and cultural capital have blurred in recent years, especially with findings like Stuber's (2009) that show the "interdependence of social and cultural capital: one often flows from the other" (p.882).

Conceptual Framework: Capital and Employability

Building on Bourdieu's (1986) work, Tomlinson (2017) developed a conceptual framework that directly builds on the concept of capital in relation to college graduate employability. Tomlinson joined Holmes (2013) in critiquing the current discourse on human capital as the primary mechanism for graduate employability and offered a new theory of graduate capital inclusive of five capitals: human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological. The five capitals are meant to be used by college educators to prepare graduates for employability after the completion of a degree.

Figure 1

The Five Graduate Employability Capitals



Note: The graphic representation in Figure 1 was developed by Nghia et al. (2023) to illustrate the five graduate employability capitals developed by Tomlinson (2017).

Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship of the five capitals to generate graduate employability capital. Tomlinson (2017) defines human capital as the job-related skills transmitted through education in the pursuit of a degree and updates the prior definitions of social and cultural capital in the process. Social capital is the “sum of social relationships and networks that help mobilise graduates’ existing human capital” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 342) and draws on the importance of group membership for success. Tomlinson (2017) then identifies the cultural capital needed for entry into a particular field or industry inclusive of graduates learning

the norms and behaviors expected within that industry, not centering cultural capital only in terms of access to elite society as Bourdieu (1986) did. Tomlinson (2017) updates the definition of cultural capital to recognize that different industries have their own cultural capital. For example, a manufacturing company is likely looking for different cultural signifiers than a technology company. Tomlinson (2017) added two new capitals which are primarily internal to the graduate: identity capital and psychological capital. Graduates build these two throughout their time in college and through experiential learning; these capitals help students determine a career of interest and maintain resilience in the face of changing labor markets, and when faced with bias and discrimination. The five capitals proposed by Tomlinson (2017) bring together human capital theory with social and cultural capital theories and direct them toward graduate employability, which can impact postgraduate career outcomes.

For this study, I will utilize Tomlinson's (2017) framework specifically on social and cultural capital to highlight the positive shift that interventions programmatically at the college level that can begin to utilize to improve students' postgraduate career outcomes. Focusing on social and cultural capital in internships gives the disquisition study a clear focus on two of the five graduate employability capitals to measure from an external immersion experience.

Internships are immersive, time-limited interventions where students temporarily become employees in new organizations.

In the following sections, I will discuss the causal analysis for the lack of emphasis on programmatic efforts for postgraduate career outcomes in higher education, my local context of UNC Asheville, outline my theory of improvement utilizing Tomlinson's graduate employability capitals framework, and propose a new design for an internship program focused on capitals to be implemented at UNC Asheville.

A Causal Analysis

In this section, I utilize the theoretical framework to provide a causal analysis for a lack of social mobility among college graduates, especially those students from a lower SES background. The section begins with a description of improvement science, which provides the grounding for the improvement work of this study, a description of causal analysis as an improvement tool, followed by a figure that depicts four primary causes for the problem with supporting extant literature.

Improvement Science

Improvement Science is “a systematic approach to continuous improvement in complex organizations” (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p.1). Used most often by the healthcare industry, but gaining in popularity within education, improvement science invites practitioners working within an organization to utilize scholarly methods of study to generate a needed change to improve a problem within their organization (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). In improvement science, scholar-practitioners identify a problem, examine the root causes of the problem with consideration for the systems involved in creating the problem, analyze it within their local context, determine a theory of improvement, and implement and assess an improvement initiative addressing the problem within their organization (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020).

Root Cause Analysis

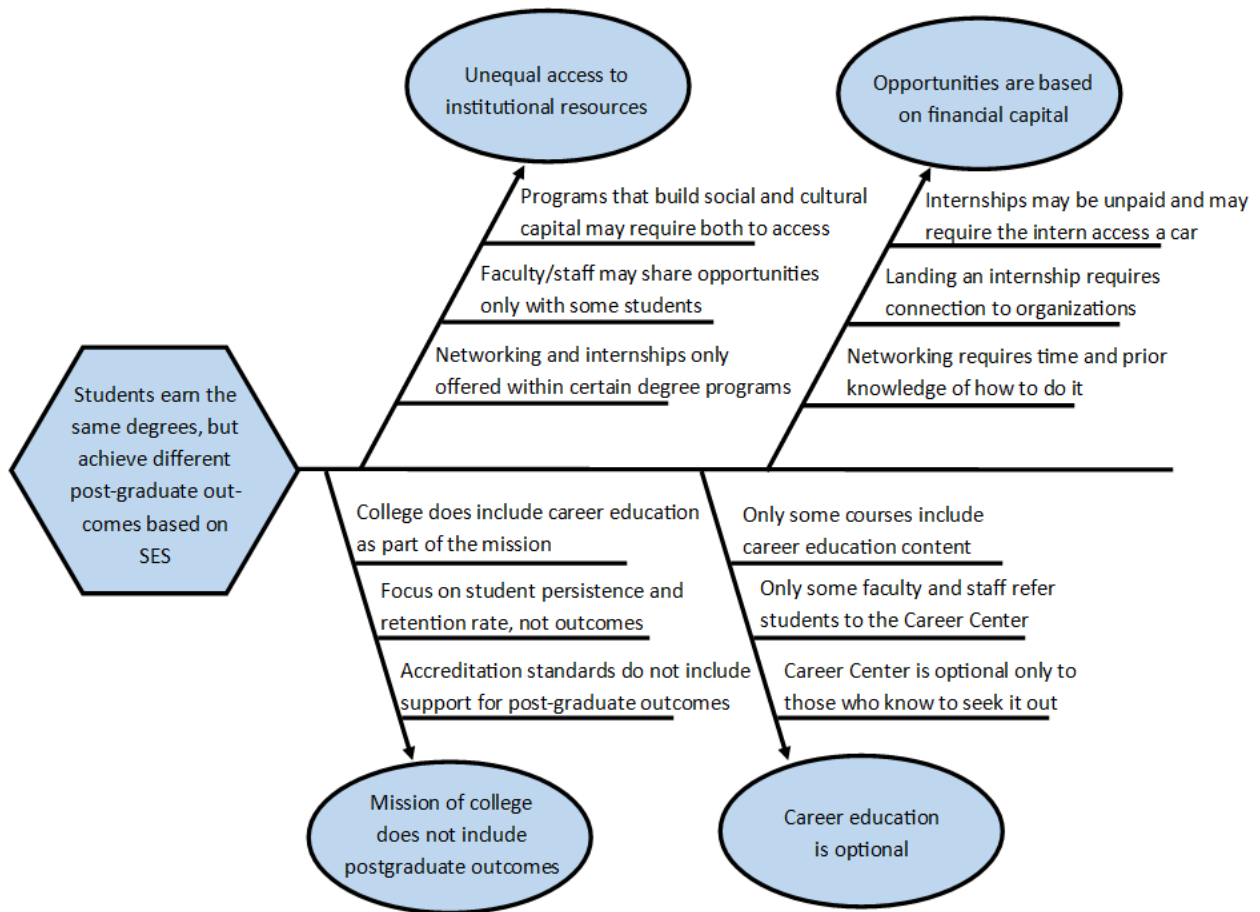
Root Cause Analysis (RCA) is a process used to seek out the underlying causes of an organizational problem. While it may be easy to see individual problems, RCA is a framework to understand how several individual problems are connected to a larger system (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). RCA was born out of manufacturing but has found a place in improvement science work, giving educators a method to explore causes for problems within educational

systems at several levels including structural, organizational, policy, ideological, capacity, historical, resource, and practice/pedagogical (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). A tool used to support RCA is the fishbone diagram. Fishbone diagrams originated in improvement science work in the 1980s by Karou Ishikawa as a diagram to identify cause and effect (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The fishbone diagram includes the primary problem as the head of the fish, the individually identified problems make up the parts of each bone, and each bone has a common theme. While individual problems can be minimized by members of the organization as isolated incidents on a micro-level, when combined as a bone on the fish, it is easier to see the greater system at work creating the problem at the head of the fish.

Figure 2 below is a fishbone diagram outlining the root causes for a lack of social mobility among college graduates, especially students from lower SES backgrounds. Because most colleges rely on similar organizational structures and programs, the causes included in this diagram show the effects of social reproduction theory where the system of existing capital including social, cultural, and financial, provides the means for students to further increase their social, cultural, and financial capital (Bourdieu, 1986); the causes become a greater problem for students with lower SES who cannot rely on social reproduction for postgraduate outcomes. Identified in the fishbone diagram below are four primary causes including the misaligned mission of higher education, optional status of career education, uneven access to institutional connections, and college programming initiatives that require financial resources to access.

Figure 2

Fishbone Demonstrating Causal Analysis



Mission of Higher Education

The first bone centers on a question that drives much of the decision-making at colleges: is higher education a public good or a private good? The question is continually being debated by college administrators and students across the United States (Chan, 2016). Students' perceptions of the reasons to pursue higher education since its inception have moved from civic engagement (public good) to professional advantage (private good), but many colleges have not updated their missions or measures of success to reflect the current expectations of their student bodies (Chan,

2016). Colleges often advertise postgraduate career outcomes as an admissions recruitment strategy to attract incoming students, but the same outcomes may be missing from the official mission of the college. Further, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) does not include postgraduate career outcomes or efforts to improve postgraduate career outcomes as a principle of accreditation (SACSCOC, 2018).

The markers colleges typically use to define success are retention and graduation rates, which do not include postgraduate career outcomes (Millea et al., 2018; Venit, 2023). Notably, in 2018 an interim Chancellor at UNC Asheville shared with me that they expected students to be underemployed for several years after graduation as they explored the world and themselves deciding where and how to use their degree. The interaction, while only an anecdote, demonstrates a disconnect between senior administration and students' interpretations of the purpose of a college degree. While students attend college focused on their career outcomes (Chan, 2016), colleges invest in programs to increase retention and graduation rates (Millea et al., 2018). The misalignment means that colleges are often not investing in programs to increase the type of outcomes that matter most to their students: career outcomes.

Career Education is Optional

The lack of significant focus on postgraduate career outcomes as a measure of institutional success for colleges means that at most colleges there is not a comprehensive campus-wide approach to careers in the way that there may be for graduation and retention rates. Career education is typically carried out by a career center or career services office within the college if they have one (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2018). At colleges with a career center, the career center is typically a stand-alone student service, and students can decide whether or not to take advantage of the service; services typically include one-on-one career advising, informational

workshops, and events to bring employers to campus to meet students. Even with the shifting paradigm within career education as a profession to integrate more fully into the student experience, the efforts to do so typically must originate with the career center leadership and staff (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2018). Dey & Cruzvergara (2018) outline the evolution of career services in higher education from 1900 to the present finding that despite gains made in the visibility and integration of career education on some college campuses, the onus for the promotion of career education and resources relies on the career center itself rather than as a focus of the institution as a whole.

Further, regional accreditation standards do not require career education to happen in academic classrooms (SACSCOC, 2018), meaning that career education only happens in the classroom when faculty choose to incorporate it. Students, especially first-generation and students with marginalized identities report not utilizing their career centers because it is not built into the expectation of the student experience, and they do not know how it might be helpful (Park-Yancy, 2012). According to the 2018 Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey, 78% of alumni reported either rarely or never utilizing career services while pursuing their degree. Career education may be available on college campuses but keeping it as an optional service ensures that not all students will receive the same levels of career education while pursuing a degree.

Unequal Access to Institutional Resources

Similarly to unequal career education for college students, not all students have the same access to extra-curricular programming. Extra-curricular programs on college campuses that provide the opportunity for students to increase their social and cultural capital often actively gatekeep access, by requiring students to meet standards to participate that need higher levels of

pre-existing social, cultural, or financial capital. Examples include programs to meet with alumni, networking receptions, internships, and more. Institutional gatekeeping for these types of programs includes but is not limited to, practices that require letters of recommendation and/or professional references, dress codes, asking colleagues to recommend their ‘best students’ for an opportunity instead of a fair published methodology for all students to apply, lengthy time commitments, opportunities that require a personal vehicle, subjective interviews, and more. Typically, these gatekeeping methods purport to assess students’ professionalism and readiness, as determined by the institutional gatekeepers who run the programs. A study of the relationship between professionalism and social and cultural capital in Further Education programs in England found that high levels of professionalism and high levels of social and cultural capital are highly correlated, with cultural capital being the most highly correlated with professionalism (Tully, 2023). Social reproduction theory supports that students who enter college with more social and cultural capital are thereby better prepared to make it through gatekeepers who assess students’ social and cultural capital to determine access to extra-curricular programs.

In addition to gatekeeping access, college campuses also persist in the informal sharing of social capital with select students. While the informal sharing of connections on college campuses is not measured systematically, two studies found that students who develop mentoring relationships with faculty and staff gained access to both institutional resources (Museus & Neville, 2012) and career resources (Parks-Yancy, 2012). The 2018 Strada-Gallup Alumni survey confirms the critical importance of mentoring relationships for career outcomes, finding that faculty and staff mentors had a strong influence on alumni postgraduate career outcomes and satisfaction with their degrees, but most often these mentors did not come from a formal mentoring program. Instead, faculty and staff formed an informal mentor bond with

students through class, advising, or other programming. Most colleges rely on the informal building of mentoring relationships rather than establishing a formal campus-wide program, leaving the building of social capital up to the student to seek out. Social reproduction theory tells us that the students who have more social capital entering college are more likely to have been provided with the information needed to know how to seek out these relationships to continue to build their social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Stuber, 2009). Gatekeeping and informal mentoring conspire to continue the system of social reproduction on college campuses.

Opportunities to Build Social and Cultural Capital are Based on Financial Capital

In addition, many opportunities to build social and cultural capital require students to spend money. Two examples demonstrate how financial capital is needed to access career-building programs: internships and off-campus networking events called career treks. The National Survey of College Internships (NSCI) 2021 report found that the primary barrier for students to access internships is financial (Hora et al., 2021). Run by the Center for Research on College and Workforce Transitions (CCWT) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the NSCI surveyed over 12,000 students across 17 campuses including public and private in 2021 (Hora et al., 2021). Of the 67% of students surveyed who had wanted to take an internship but did not, almost two-thirds cited the need for paid work; students also cited the distance needed to travel to potential internships as a barrier to participation (Hora et al., 2021). The NSCI survey demonstrates that access to an internship is often determined by current financial resources.

Similar to internships, career treks are another example of a program that builds social and cultural capital for students that requires financial capital to access. Career treks serve as a type of field trip for students that involves an overnight visit to a city of interest with tours and visits to employers who want to hire students from that college. Access to a career trek usually

includes an application process and many colleges require that students self-fund at least a portion of the career trek. For those colleges that offer financial assistance for treks, the assistance comes with the barrier of an application for assistance which requires time and energy to prove that the student qualifies for aid. Once again, access to a college-sponsored program that can increase social and cultural capital requires financial investment from students.

Together, the four bones of the fish combine to create postgraduate career outcomes for college students that favor those students who enter college with higher SES, including more financial, social, and cultural capital. The result of the combined effect is that students who graduate with the same degrees experience different postgraduate career outcomes.

Local Context

This disquisition and improvement initiative are centered at UNC Asheville, which serves North Carolina as the state's only public liberal arts and sciences university. Incorporated as a junior college for Buncombe County in 1927, UNC Asheville joined the UNC system of colleges in 1969. Located in Asheville, North Carolina, UNC Asheville offers undergraduate Bachelor of Arts and Sciences degrees in 36 major areas with one graduate program, a Master of Public Health, which officially began in 2022. Since 2018, the enrollment at UNC Asheville has decreased from 3,800 to 2,900 as of fall 2023, due in part to significant challenges in retention coupled with the decline in college enrollment seen during the COVID-19 pandemic of the early 2020s. UNC Asheville serves the residents of North Carolina through a campus open to the public, and by admitting a student body that was over 85% in-state students in 2023. As a state-funded college and one of 17 institutions in the UNC System, UNC Asheville's mission is driven by the UNC System mission, which is to:

discover, create, transmit, and apply knowledge to address the needs of individuals and society. This mission is accomplished through instruction, which communicates the knowledge and values and imparts the skills necessary for individuals to lead responsible, productive, and personally satisfying lives; through research, scholarship, and creative activities, which advance knowledge and enhance the educational process; and through public service, which contributes to the solution of societal problems and enriches the quality of life in the State. (General Statute, Chapter 116, 1971)

Notably, neither the UNC System mission nor the UNC Asheville mission statement directly addresses expectations for postgraduate career outcomes in terms of employment or further education.

Career Center at UNC Asheville

Every year the Career Center at UNC Asheville runs the First Destination Survey (FDS) to measure what students do in their first year after completing a degree: full-time employment, part-time employment, graduate school, service year, military, etc. FDS is a tool used nationally by NACE to measure the immediate impact of a college degree on employment; NACE collects this data from member colleges to compile a national database of college outcomes. Over the past five years, the FDS data outcomes show that UNC Asheville graduates lag behind the national average on starting salaries for college graduates at all colleges and at colleges within our Carnegie Classification of Baccalaureate Arts & Sciences as calculated by NACE.

Figure 3 and Figure 4 demonstrate the difference in the responses to the First Destination Survey for UNC Asheville graduates versus graduates from colleges within the same Carnegie Classification from across the United States.

Figure 3

NACE First Destinations for the College Class of 2023

FIRST DESTINATIONS FOR THE COLLEGE CLASS OF 2023

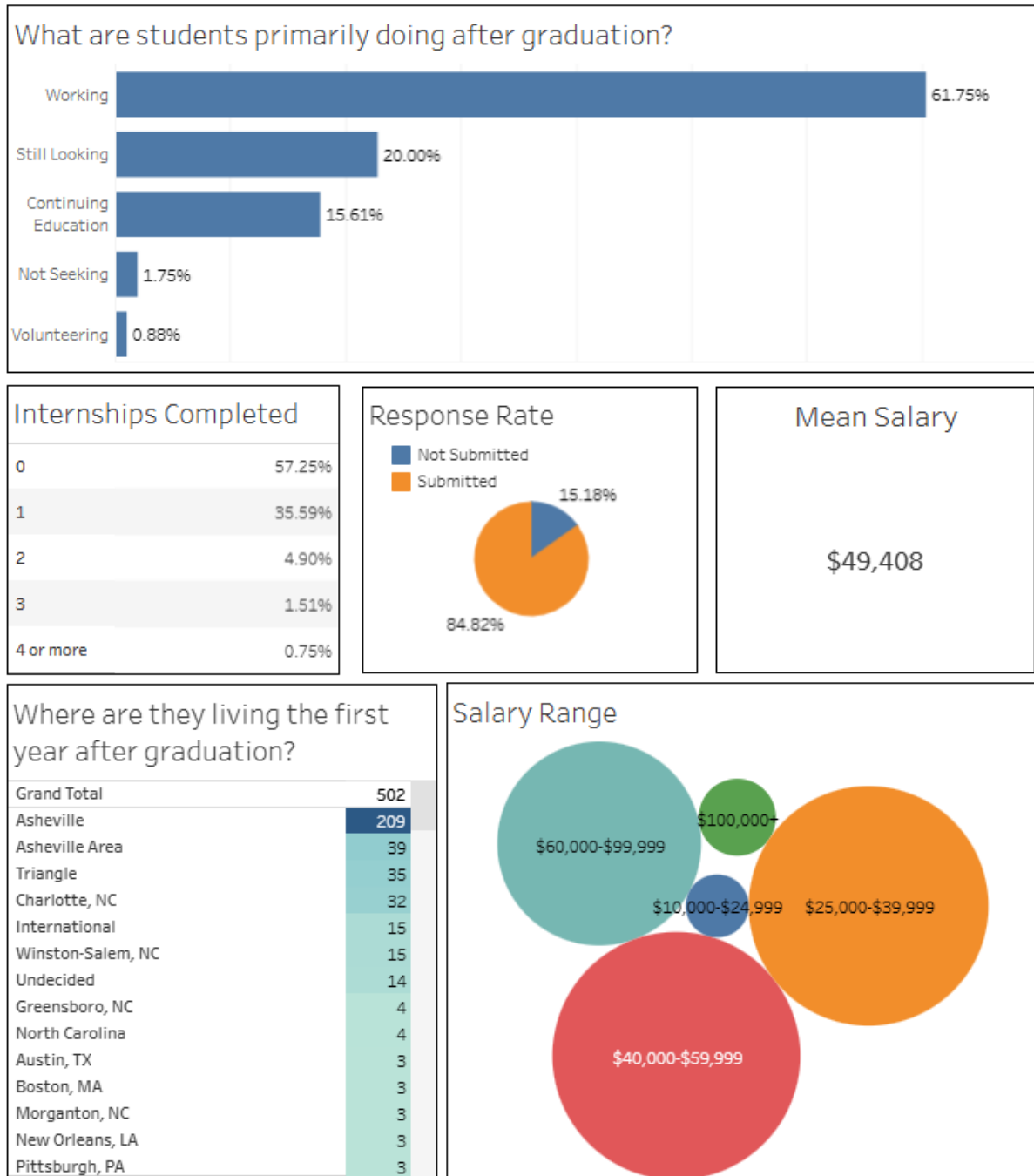


Note. This figure is a direct screenshot of the NACE First Destination Data for colleges within the Carnegie classification of Baccalaureate Arts & Sciences for the year 2023, the most recent year published at the time of this disquisition. The dashboard is prepared by NACE and aggregated from First Destination Surveys from colleges across the United States, including UNC Asheville.

Figure 4

UNC Asheville First Destinations for the College Class of 2023

FDS_AY_22-23 by [Lindsey Kuykendall](#)



Note. This figure is a direct screenshot of the destination data for UNC Asheville graduates for the year 2023 including December 2022 and May 2023 graduates, the most recent year published

at the time of this proposal writing. This data is collected by the Career Center at UNC Asheville at graduation and within the 11 months following graduation via online survey, phone survey, and knowledge reports from faculty, staff, and LinkedIn.

In 2023, UNC Asheville graduates reported starting salaries at \$49,408 compared to the national average of \$56,310. The 2022 FDS results showed an even greater gap with a national average salary of \$55,999 and UNC Asheville starting salaries at \$45,162. Additionally, UNC Asheville graduates are more likely to report “Still Seeking” in the first year after graduation at a rate of 20% compared to the national average of 7.2% in 2023 and 36% compared to a national average of 6.5% in 2022. That UNC Asheville graduates are lagging in starting salary and securing full-time employment is especially troubling as year over year up to one-third of UNC Asheville students qualify for Pell Grant offers, the most aid offered by the federal government, and a marker of lower SES. Based on FDS, most alumni at UNC Asheville report their first step after graduation does not increase their SES. The New York Times has released a social mobility index for colleges, ranking how well colleges move their students up in SES within five years of obtaining a degree. In *The New York Times* social mobility index, UNC Asheville is ranked 338 out of 369 selective public colleges at moving students up in SES (New York Times, n.d.).

In 2022, senior administration began to take a look at UNC Asheville’s FDS as it relates to positioning the college in the admissions market for the anticipated enrollment cliff of 2025 and the increasing competition amongst colleges for a shrinking number of high school graduates. The new focus on postgraduate career outcomes from the administration led to a direct increase in funding for the Career Center, including a change in location to a more prominent physical space on campus in the middle of Ramsey Library. The influx of resources increased the Career Center’s programmatic efforts to prepare students for stronger postgraduate

career outcomes. The influx of resources does not have a policy mandate attached to it, and the next section covers policy related to postgraduate career outcomes at UNC Asheville.

State and Federal Policies and the Impact on the Local Context

At the state-wide level, Chapter 116 of the North Carolina General Statute for higher education includes governance, human relations, and more for the UNC System. In this statute, only two sections relate to the practice of helping students to obtain postgraduate career outcomes including Board of Trustees to Permit Recruiter Access (1981) for requiring that recruiter access to schools be inclusive of the military and Students Know Before You Go (2016) related to sharing information on careers and college majors. Requiring schools not to discriminate against military recruiters is less about postgraduate career outcomes and more about maintaining access for military recruiters to college campuses. Thus, there is only one part of North Carolina General Statute Chapter 116 in the establishment and governance of the UNC System that directly relates to postgraduate career outcomes, commonly known in the UNC System and the North Carolina Community College System as Know Before You Go. Know Before You Go (2016) is a state-level example of the national College Transparency Act that requires the State Education Assistance Authority (SEAA) to provide and annually update information on the cost of degree programs, majors, and the employment outlook including anticipated salary associated with those programs and majors. The bill states its purpose is to provide information on postgraduate career outcomes for students as they make decisions on both schools and majors (Know Before You Go, 2016). Know Before You Go is an example of the national rhetoric using human capital theory to assume that specific degrees lead to specific workforce outcomes.

Despite the rhetoric, news articles, and position statements, there remains almost no official policy, at any level, addressing student postgraduate career outcomes. NACE released a position paper in 2023 calling on the Federal Department of Labor to end unpaid internships due to the way that they perpetuate inequality in career outcomes based on SES, but there has not yet been any action taken on that recommendation by an official body (NACE, 2023a). At the federal and state levels, the current policies focus on sharing degree program data outcomes with students (Know Before You Go, 2016; The College Transparency Act, 2021). Locally, the UNC Asheville Board of Trustees is interested in alumni data and the caliber of employers visiting campus, which results in a de facto unwritten policy for the UNC Asheville Career Center to improve both of these areas. On paper, however, no policies exist at the local, state, or federal level. Additionally, our accrediting agency, SACSCOC, does not directly address postgraduate career outcomes as part of accreditation. Keeping the focus of any existing policy on human capital, where skills and degrees equal jobs, allows fertile ground for social reproduction, as it ignores the subjectivity of the hiring process that is greatly influenced by graduates' levels of social and cultural capital in relation to their hiring managers.

My Professional Role and Positionality at UNC Asheville

As the director of the Career Center at UNC Asheville, my professional role and positionality provide me with the perspective to see the impact of subjectivity in the hiring process when preparing students for their careers after graduation. Within the local context of UNC Asheville, I am a white, middle-class, able-bodied, cis woman with a Master of Education degree from The College of William and Mary and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wake Forest University. I attended my undergraduate college as a student using federal financial aid and merit aid and completed my graduate program using both private and federal loans. While pursuing

both of my degrees, I worked multiple part-time jobs on and off campus that prevented me from accessing institutional connections in the form of networking programs and internships.

Currently, I am a director of a Career Center at a public liberal arts college with a high number of low-income students, including about 30% each year receiving Pell grants. Thus, I have multiple overlapping identities that relate to all subjects of this study: college administration and career centers in my professional experience, and the experience of being a lower SES college student now working to support lower SES college students.

As a career development professional, I am likely to source and prefer ideas from professionals within career development on methods to improve postgraduate career outcomes. It was important for me to be inclusive in researching potential improvement ideas from outside of this field and including college professionals from other disciplines on the improvement science design team. Also, because I am the Career Center director at UNC Asheville, I hold the dual role of researcher and director of one of the people on my design team. As their director, I hold greater authority and power over that team member. While my experience is that our Career Center team is open, honest, and cohesive, I am the person in the group with more power and that power difference could lead to a team that is unlikely to challenge or speak up with different ideas. Throughout the project, I built a culture of trust and included methods for feedback and critique that allowed team members to express these in the manner with which they were most comfortable, be it in team meetings, in private conversations, or via anonymous feedback. I made it explicit that all feedback and critique came with no consequences to our ongoing supervisory relationship.

Throughout this work, I relied on my improvement science design team (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020) and my committee and faculty at Western Carolina University to challenge my

assumptions and provide critiques of conclusions that highlighted areas my positionality makes me inclined to miss. As I researched and implemented the improvement initiative, I continually asked: who is being left out? As I considered the project implementation I asked: who may be harmed by this improvement? By acknowledging my positionality, assembling a strong team, and encouraging the critique of team members and advisors, I worked to reduce bias as it arose throughout the project.

A Proposed Improvement Initiative: The UNC Asheville Internship Program

My theory of improvement holds that a college-led internship program structured to remove barriers to access and build social and cultural capital will improve postgraduate career outcomes for students. The systemic causes of lower postgraduate career outcomes for lower SES students point to the need for colleges to create structures to intentionally share institutional connections with students and provide dedicated programming to help students build cultural capital for job-seeking. This section outlines how the UNC Asheville Internship Program eliminated the barriers typically associated with internship programs for students with lower SES and intentionally used internship programming to share social capital and build cultural capital with UNC Asheville students, increasing two of the five graduate employability capitals described by Tomlinson et al., (2022).

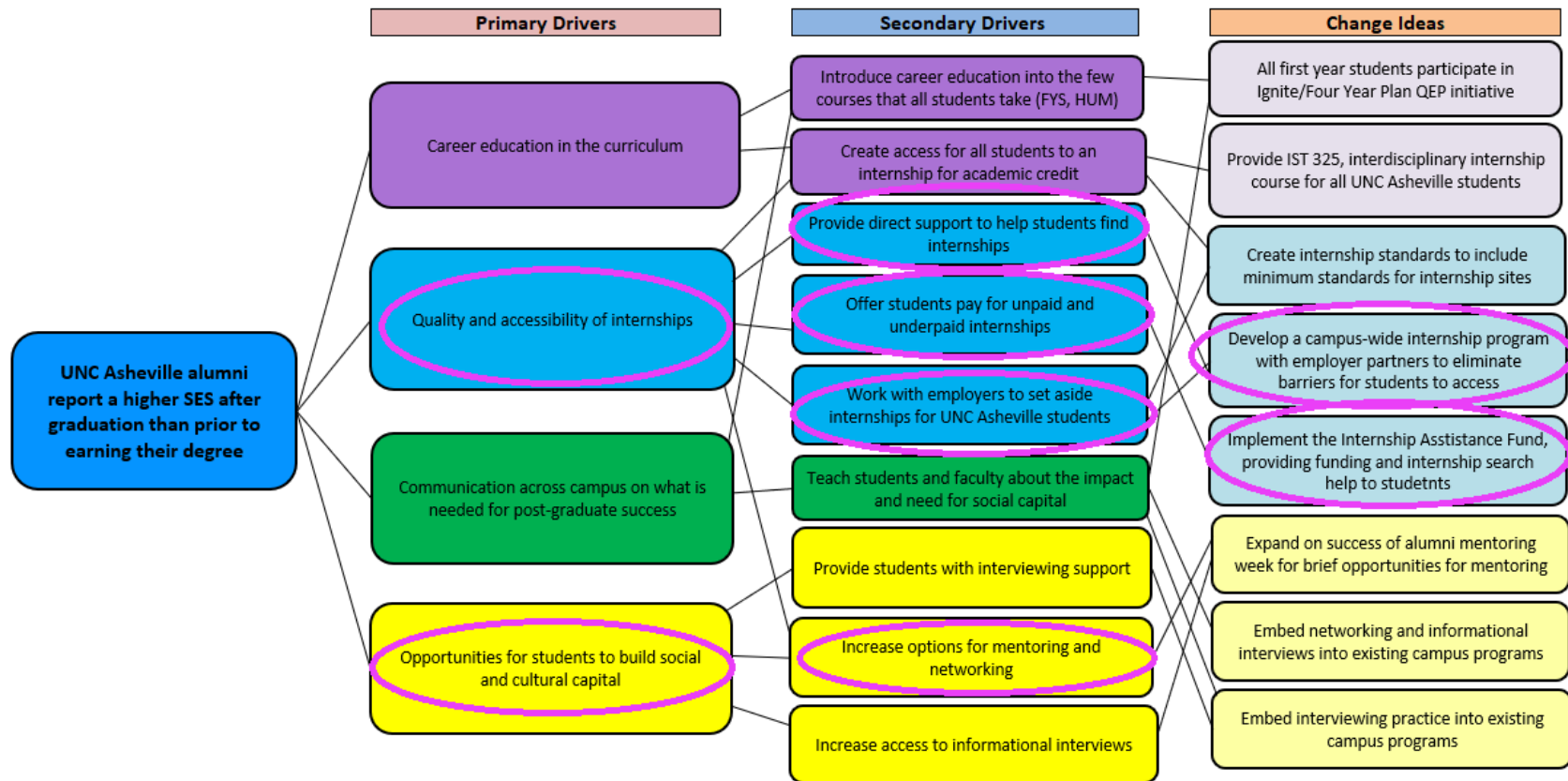
Driver Diagram

In improvement science, a driver diagram is used to create a visual outline of a theory of improvement (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The diagram illustrates the primary and secondary drivers that influence the desired outcome and the change ideas that will move the drivers toward improvement (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Primary and secondary drivers are neutral; they influence the outcome but do not function in a direction, positive or negative until impacted by the change idea (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The driver diagram in Figure 5 provides a theory of

improvement for postgraduate career outcomes at UNC Asheville and identifies four primary drivers for the improvement of postgraduate career outcomes including career education in the curriculum, quality and accessibility of internships, clear communication for faculty and staff on what students need for postgraduate success, and opportunities for students to build social and cultural capital. From there nine secondary drivers are identified related to career education in the classroom, quality and accessibility of internships, communication across campus, and developing opportunities for students to build social and cultural capital. The change ideas in the third column clarify and provide a programmatic focus area to affect the primary and secondary drivers.

Figure 5

Driver Diagram Demonstrating Theory of Improvement for Postgraduate Career Outcomes



Note. The driver diagram includes four primary drivers drawn from academic literature on social and cultural capital in the hiring process as well as alumni data from the National Career Mobility Survey Report (The Career Leadership Collective, 2022).

The UNC Asheville Internship Program

Based on my theory of improvement, the improvement initiative was a campus-wide internship program designed to address two of the primary drivers from the driver diagram in Figure 5. With intentional design, the internship program provided financial access to quality internships, shared institutional connections with students, and generated a long-term opportunity for students to gain the cultural capital needed to be offered employment by hiring managers within their chosen career field.

Internship is a broad term often used casually to describe a wide range of co-curricular experiences related to potential employment (Hora et al., 2021). Using the NACE definition of internships, the parameters of an internship become more precise:

An internship is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional workplace setting (across in-person, remote, or hybrid modalities).

Internships provide students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience, develop social capital, explore career fields, and make connections in professional fields. In addition, internships serve as a significant recruiting mechanism for employers, providing them with the opportunity to guide and evaluate potential candidates. (NACE, 2023a)

Notably, the 2023 updated version of the definition of internships from NACE includes the mention of social capital, which was not a part of the prior definition. The definition also updates the types of modalities in which students may intern, given the rise of remote internships during the COVID-19 pandemic of the early 2020s. The UNC Asheville Internship program utilized the NACE definition for internships and implemented a structure designed to support the building of graduate employability capitals, specifically social and cultural capital.

At UNC Asheville, no significant research has been conducted on the impact of internships on students' postgraduate outcomes or graduate employability capitals. The only internship measure that currently exists is a percentage of graduates who report in the FDS that they completed an internship during their time at UNC Asheville; a percentage which typically fluctuates between 48% and 53% from year to year. The UNC Asheville Internship Program provided new insight into the inner workings of internships at UNC Asheville to determine the aspects of an internship program that have a positive impact on students' social and cultural capital.

Primary Program Components

To increase the benefit of internships as an improvement for postgraduate career outcomes for students with lower SES, an internship program needed to be designed to eliminate financial barriers to access (Hora et al., 2021), strategically share institutional connections for students without family and personal connections to find internships, and support students during the internship to intentionally build cultural capital in their chosen industry. To reach these goals, the primary components of the UNC Asheville Internship Program were: 1) financial support for students, 2) social and cultural capital resources provided by the college and the employer, 3) institutional support for students and sites during the internship-site matching process, and 4) support and direction for students and site supervisors to build graduate employability capitals throughout the internship.

Financial Support for Students. Internship surveys across the United States have gathered information on the financial barriers to access for students, making it well-established (Fischer, 2022; Gatta, 2023; Hora et al., 2021; Shandra, 2022; The Career Leadership Collective, 2022). Consequently, the UNC Asheville Internship Program required that for-profit

organizations offering internships through the UNC Asheville Internship Program provide adequate hourly rate compensation for their interns. For nonprofits and government organizations lacking the funds to pay an intern, the UNC Asheville Internship Assistance Fund was used to provide compensation for those internships through a \$1500 scholarship for the duration of the internship. With two sources of funding, internship sites and the UNC Asheville Internship Assistance Fund, the project ensured that every intern UNC Asheville Internship Program was paid.

Social and Cultural Capital Resources Provided. The second component of the program was the intentional sharing of institutional connections with students, with the development of internship sites by staff at UNC Asheville for the Internship Program. College internship programs often require the student to use their own social capital to source internship sites (Hora et al., 2021; Stuber, 2009). Instead, the Career Center at UNC Asheville used current institutional connections with employers to build a list of internship sites to share with students in the UNC Asheville Internship Program. Students in the UNC Asheville Internship Program did not have to use pre-existing personal and family networks to source an internship site. Additionally, students did not have to ‘spend’ current social and cultural capital to gain access to the program. All students needed to participate in the program was to be one of the first students to sign up, up to the participant number cap. Students did not need to ask for references, write an essay, interview, or provide additional proof of current social and cultural capital to be eligible. Further, the UNC Asheville Internship Program built social capital for students over the duration of the internship: for an organization to be a part of the list of sites for the UNC Asheville Internship Program, they had to agree to provide regular supervision to develop a relationship for

the student with a member of that organization and agree to introduce the student to at least one other person in their industry of interest at another organization.

Institutional Support for Students and Sites to Build Graduate Employability

Capitals. Institutional support for students and sites during the internship-site matching process was the third component of the program. The Career Center cannot place students at participant internship sites due to professional ethical guidelines for career centers from NACE and guidance from legal counsel at UNC Asheville. To ensure equity of access to opportunity, positions must be advertised to all students who meet the qualifications for the position (NACE, 2020), therefore all internships set aside for the UNC Asheville Internship Program were shared with all students within the program. Students selected which sites in the program they wanted to have their application materials sent and the sites then determined who to interview and offer an internship. The UNC Asheville Internship Program provided students with preparation workshops that covered expectations in written application materials, interviews, and on-site behavioral expectations during the internship. During the internship matching process when resumes were sent to sites for review, the Internship Program Manager and Director in the Career Center supported students and sites to try to ensure that all students who signed up for the program secured an internship at a participant organization.

Support and Direction for Students and Site Supervisors. Finally, and most importantly, social, and cultural capital was both shared and built during the internship itself. The UNC Asheville Internship Program provided support to students and site supervisors during the internship to ensure that this happened. All students and site supervisors in the UNC Asheville Internship Program received a check-in interview via Zoom or in person and support from the Career Center at UNC Asheville over the semester-long internship experience. Students

and site supervisors were prompted via email with topics listed in Appendix A for discussion during weekly supervision meetings that focused on building social and cultural capital and directly addressed the validated graduate capital scale items from Tomlinson et al. (2022).

The four components served as the foundation for the UNC Asheville Internship Program, making it one of the only internship programs in the nation to focus on the elimination of capital for access. UNC Asheville has other internship programs on campus, but not a program that is open to students of any major, provides sites established by the university, focuses on sharing social capital (connections) and generating cultural capital, and guarantees funding for students. Due to the state funding utilized for the UNC Asheville Internship Program, participation had to be open to all UNC Asheville students. To reach students who may have greater need, the program spent additional time advertising through the offices for first generation students, the food equity initiative, and offices that serve lower SES students at UNC Asheville. To create a new campus-wide internship program with an equitable structure for students to access, a strong team was needed to implement the plan and provide ongoing feedback. The following sections define and ground the internship program in improvement science and describe the implementation design including the design team, project timeline, and the anticipated barriers and challenges for the UNC Asheville Internship Program.

Improvement Initiative Design

Improvement science asks scholar-practitioners to engage in improvement based on the Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycle (Hinnant–Crawford, 2020). Each part of the PDSA cycle prompts the practitioner-researcher to ask and answer specific questions before moving to the next part. The UNC Asheville Internship Program ran one full PDSA cycle over eight months from February 2024 to September 2024, including the preparation, introduction, execution, and

conclusion of a summer 2024 internship program. This section introduces the design team and then covers each part of the timeline and implementation plan and its part in the PDSA cycle.

Design Team

The design team for the UNC Asheville Internship Program included Grace Champion, Internship Program Manager, Dr. Regine Criser, Director of Student Success and Associate Professor of Languages and Literatures, MJ Gamelin, May 2023 alum of UNC Asheville and Assistant Director for the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Kristi McMillan former coordinator of internships at the Asheville Art Museum and current Program Manager for the College for Seniors program at the Osher Life Long Learning Center at UNC Asheville and Lisa Mann, Director of the Career Center at UNC Asheville. The design team was purposefully selected to engage the greater UNC Asheville campus community, ensure representation of the types of participants within the internship program (employers and students), and consider the perspectives of diverse stakeholders.

Grace Champion was hired into the role of Internship Program Manager in July 2023 after serving as Career Coach in the UNC Asheville Career Center for one year. Before this experience, she served for two years as the Director of Career & Life Planning at Lees Macrae College in Banner Elk, North Carolina. Grace was hired to create and implement the internship program in the summer of 2023 after a request to build a campus-wide internship program from the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. The request came with funding for a new position, the Internship Program Manager position and Grace was the first person serving in the role in the UNC Asheville Career Center. Grace has experience with employer development from her prior

positions and reports to the Associate Director for Employer Relations in the UNC Asheville Career Center⁵. From here, Grace is referred to as the Internship Program Manager.

Dr. Regine Criser manages the Academic Advising office and our Student Success Specialists and is a professor of German at UNC Asheville in the Languages and Literatures program. Dr. Criser was instrumental in the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for UNC Asheville's SACSCOC reaccreditation in the 2022-2023 school year, which saw the implementation of a new First Year Seminar peer advising and community building cohort. Colleagues and senior administration frequently seek out Dr. Criser to advise on student success-related initiatives and to serve on committees across campus. Dr. Criser provided faculty and administration perspectives for the UNC Asheville Internship Program. She served in an advisory capacity on the design team, attending meetings and providing guidance. Throughout the design and implementation, Dr. Criser provided access to resources from Academic Affairs at UNC Asheville and served as a champion of the program in meetings across campus.

MJ Gamelin graduated from UNC Asheville with a Bachelor of Arts in Drama and a minor in Arts Management and Entrepreneurship in May 2023. They rejoined the university in September 2023 as Assistant Director in the Office of Multicultural Affairs. MJ served in an advisory capacity on the design team and advocated for the program within Student Affairs and with student groups across the campus. They brought to the design team the perspective of a recent student and a needed eye for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

⁵ The Associate Director for Employer Relations was intentionally not a part of the Internship Program design team. They work with the Internship Program Manager on employer development for the internship program, inclusive of referring employers to the Internship Program Manager who may be interested in the internship program and ensuring the Internship Program Manager follows the UNC Asheville standards for employer outreach (timely communication, thorough follow-up, and professional communication).

Kristi McMillan oversaw the internship programs at the Asheville Art Museum prior to working as the College for Seniors Program Manager in the Osher Life Long Learning Center at UNC Asheville. Through the Art and Art History department, UNC Asheville had an established internship program, with students interning with the Asheville Art Museum every semester under Kristi's guidance, a program that continued after her departure. Kristi served in an advisory role on the design team to bring a needed employer perspective to the UNC Asheville Internship Program and was able to provide that without the additional pressure of being a current employer in the internship program.

The researcher's role as Director of the Career Center and leader of the design team was to create the vision and goals for the UNC Asheville Internship Program, bring together the design team regularly, and guide the structure and assessment of the internship program. As director of the Career Center, the researcher regularly met with the Internship Program Manager to discuss progress on the rollout of the internship program. The UNC Asheville Internship Program is the Internship Program Manager's full-time position at UNC Asheville, as such, the Internship Program Manager's role on the design team was to develop the project plan and structure, and directly recruit and interact with the participants in the program including both employers and students. Together, the Internship Program Manager and the researcher sought input and collaboration from members of the Career Center staff who were not members of the design team, including the Associate Director for Employer Relations, the Associate Director for Student Employment Development, the Associate Director for Career Education, the Career Coach, the Career Center Program Assistant, and the Career Coach Intern for 2023 – 2024 academic year. Several of the Career Center staff had coaching appointments with students in the program and interacted with employers in the program when the Internship Program Manager

and the researcher were out of the office. The members of the Career Center staff also helped to market the program and field questions about the program from students, employers, staff, and faculty.

As Director of the Career Center, the researcher has ultimate responsibility for the direction and vision of all of the programs within the Career Center. As a scholar-practitioner using a new Career Center program for this disquisition, the researcher had a vested interest in its success professionally and educationally. Inviting members of the design team who are not directly supervised by the researcher ensured that the dual roles of director and researcher did not become entangled to the detriment of the UNC Asheville Internship Program. Additionally, having the Internship Program Manager supervised by the Associate Director for Employer Relations provided a level of oversight external to the UNC Asheville Internship Program design team. The researcher also relied on the doctoral committee to challenge and critique the decisions made as a scholar-practitioner throughout the disquisition process.

Implementation Plan and Timeline

The UNC Asheville Internship Program ran a full PDSA cycle from February 2024 through September 2024 as seen in Appendix B, but the foundational and structural changes needed at the university happened in the year leading up to the implementation plan and timeline. The UNC Asheville Internship Program proposal and request for funding was developed by the researcher in her role as Career Center director in the spring 2023 semester, then shared with and approved by UNC Asheville senior administration, including the Chancellor and Chancellor's cabinet. With the support of the university and the UNC Asheville Career Center, the Internship Program Manager and researcher ran a test of the internship program in the spring 2024 semester with 21 students participating in internships from February through May of 2024. The test of the

UNC Asheville Internship program provided informal guidance for the design team in the planning phase for the official launch with the first PDSA cycle in February 2024.

Plan

The official launch of the UNC Asheville Internship Program began with the plan phase of the PDSA cycle in February 2024 (Appendix B). The design team convened in late February 2024 to review the plan for the UNC Asheville Internship Program including “objective, questions and predictions, plan to carry out the cycle (who, what, where, when) and the plan for data collection” (Langley et al., 2009, p.97). The design team relied heavily on the research provided by the researcher on graduate employability capitals and reducing barriers to internships, however, each member brought their expertise, experience, and perspective to improve the plan. During the planning phase, the design team discussed methods for student outreach and advertising, reviewed the preparatory workshop content, and suggested additional employers as a good fit for the internship program.

Do

From there, the UNC Asheville Internship Program moved into the Do part of the PDSA cycle. In the Do part of the cycle, scholar-practitioners “carry out the plan, document problems and unexpected observations, and begin analysis of the data” (Langley et al., 2009, p. 97). The Do part of the cycle began in March 2024 and lasted through September 2024 and included the preparation for and execution of the internships. Data collection occurred throughout the Do portion of the cycle and is mentioned here as part of the implementation plan but covered in-depth in the next section on data collection.

As planned, the UNC Asheville Internship Program ran a full PDSA cycle from March 2024 through September 2024 based on the timeline listed in Appendix B. A few changes in the

implementation are noted here and will be discussed further in the results section, changes included the number of participants matched, the elimination of the midterm evaluation, an option for students to complete the final evaluation via two different methods, and a postponement of the final design team meeting.

The design team convened in late February 2024 and discussed marketing, student outreach and reviewed the preparatory workshop content. The Internship Program Manager developed 54 site options, with 10 internship sites offering more than one type of internship at their site. 53 students signed up for the program during the time-limited sign-up, reaching and exceeding the maximum participation number of 50 in only 4 hours of the sign-up going live online. Students then completed a required workshop in March 2024 to prepare their application materials to be sent to internship sites and to practice interview skills. Preparatory workshops were offered at various times of day and students who could not make any of the workshop times were offered accommodation to complete the workshop contents so that workshops would not be a barrier to accessing the internship program.

Most internship matches were finalized in May 2024. A total of 28 students completed the matching process and took part in the Summer 2024 UNC Asheville Internship Program. Organizations outside of education need flexibility on internship timelines, and often business needs do not align with the semester-style calendars of colleges and universities. To ensure that we were able to serve business needs, the UNC Asheville Internship Program offered flexible start dates for sites and students. Students and sites had the option of beginning their internships in May or June, and one site and intern began working hours in mid-May, while 24 began at the start of June and three started late, about two weeks into June. To ensure all site supervisors and interns received the supervision topics in Appendix A, weekly emails with topics were sent to

site supervisors and interns beginning in the first week of June 2024, as planned. For the three who started late, the first three topics were sent at once and the remainder were sent on the planned weekly schedule.

The researcher and Internship Program Manager conducted check-in interviews with site supervisors and interns separately throughout the second half of June 2024. The midterm evaluation was eliminated for students, and the final reflection included two methods to submit: via an online recorded interview using Big Interview software, or a written reflection with the same prompts as in the Big Interview recording (Appendix D). Big Interview is a software often used by Career Centers that offers the ability to create custom interview questions that can be assigned for students to answer and record on video from anywhere. After all internships were completed, focus groups were conducted in August 2024 with students in the program, site supervisors in the program, and faculty/staff at UNC Asheville not involved in the program, but involved with internships and experiential learning in other ways across the university.

Study

After the internships were complete in early August 2024, the initiative moved into the Study part of the PDSA cycle. During the Study phase of the cycle, the scholar-practitioner's role is to "complete the analysis of the data, compare data to predictions, and summarize what was learned" (Langley et al., 2009, p.97). During the Study phase of the UNC Asheville Internship Program, the researcher finalized the data collected throughout the implementation, including data collected via focus groups with students, site supervisors, and faculty and staff at UNC Asheville after the conclusion of the internships in August 2024. The data was compiled and planned to be shared with the Design Team in a September 2024 meeting.

Act

In the Act part of the cycle, scholar-practitioners determine “what changes need to be made” (Langley et al., 2009, p.97) in the next iteration of the improvement initiative, and if it is worth continuing the current improvement initiative, or if it needs to be discontinued (Langley et al., 2009). Utilizing the data on the impact of the program on students’ social and cultural capital, fidelity of implementation of the UNC Asheville Internship Program, and after reviewing any unintended consequences in the Study phase of the program, the Design Team will make recommendations and changes for the next cycle which begins in February 2025. As of December 2024, due to the effects of Hurricane Helene on Asheville, this meeting has not happened yet. This change in the implementation is further discussed in the results section of the disquisition.

Data Collection

The data collection plan was based on the foundational methodology of improvement science measures to determine if the UNC Asheville Internship Program reached its goal of increasing students’ social and cultural capital. This section includes an overview of the practical measures used in improvement science to analyze an improvement initiative and clearly defines each data collection tool used, and how, in the analysis of the UNC Asheville Internship Program.

Overview of Practical Measures

In improvement science, just as there are four parts to the PDSA improvement cycle, there are also four practical measures used to assess the improvement: driver measures, process measures, balance measures, and outcome measures (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Each type of measure has a specific aspect of the improvement to consider. The driver measures determine if

the improvement is working during the implementation of the initiative; process measures ensure the fidelity of the implementation; balance measures seek to find unintended consequences of the intervention; and outcome measures determine if the improvement made the difference it was aiming to make (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Outcome measures typically lag behind the other three measures, as it may take more time to gather data on the deeper level of impact of the improvement initiative. For the UNC Asheville Internship Program, Table 1 below outlines the data collection tools utilized by type of measure in the UNC Asheville Internship Program.

Table 1

Overview of Data Collection Tools by Type of Measure

Tool	Driver	Process	Balance	Outcome
Memo writing: researcher		X		
Check-in interview with internship site supervisors and students	X	X		
Student midterm evaluation				
Student pre- and post-surveys	X			
Student final reflection essay				X
Focus groups with site supervisors, faculty and staff, and students			X	X

Note. The timeline for each tool and its administration is in Appendix B.

Outcome Measures

In improvement science the outcome measure is usually implemented only once at the end of the improvement to measure the overall outcome of the initiative (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The theoretical framework driving the UNC Asheville Internship Program as an

improvement initiative for sharing institutional connections (social capital) and building students' cultural capital is based on Tomlinson's (2017) definition of five graduate employability capitals. Tomlinson et al., (2022) developed a scale to measure the 'employability' of college graduates based on the five graduate employability capitals. Appendix C includes pre- and post-surveys which utilize the social and cultural capital portions of the employability scale (Tomlinson et al., 2022) which were given to interns to measure growth from the beginning to the end of the internship program in these two capitals. The surveys were built in Qualtrics and administered via email at the beginning and end of the internships. The data collected is numeric using a six-point Likert Scale and intended to be compared, therefore the data analysis utilized t-tests to determine if there was a difference between social and cultural capital before and after the internship experience.

In addition to outcome measures on growth in social and cultural capital, the pre- and post-surveys asked questions about students' perceptions of the implementation of the UNC Asheville Internship Program and the direct employment outcomes of the UNC Asheville Internship Program. The pre-survey included questions to identify what made the program appealing to the students who signed up to help with future advertising, and the post-survey included a question about concrete job outcomes from the internship program, including job offers. These questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

To support and seek nuance in the quantitative outcome data being collected via the pre- and post-survey, students also completed a final reflective essay. The prompts for the essay are included in Appendix D and asked students to consider the growth in their social and cultural capital in a way that prompted the sharing of specific examples. The prompts asked students to discuss the accomplishments, skills, connections, and professional development gained

throughout the internship experience and encouraged students to consider the aspects of the UNC Asheville Internship program that were most impactful and least impactful in their growth. Students were also asked to share the next steps they have identified for their career after completing the internship, a qualitative outcome measure. The data collected through students' final reflective essays was analyzed using a priori coding found in Appendix E with pre-determined codes aligned with the descriptions of the graduate employability capitals defined by Tomlinson et al. (2022).

Driver Measures

Driver measures aim to find if the improvement is positively affecting the problem while the improvement initiative is happening (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). For the UNC Asheville Internship Program, the driver measures were implemented during the internship to assess if the internship was increasing students' social and cultural capital while the internship was happening and included the students' midterm evaluation and a check-in interview with both students and site supervisors.

The midterm evaluation, available in Appendix F, has five short-answer essay questions to be collected from students. Questions included in the midterm evaluation directly addressed the impact of the supervision topics (Appendix A) that were discussed by the site supervisor and intern before the midterm evaluation, which were developed based on the content from the graduate capital scales from Tomlinson et al., (2022). The questions were specific to the internship experience, open-ended, and based on the cultural and social capital questions included in the pre- and post-survey. Using open-ended questions instead of a Likert Scale was intentional; the open-ended questions provided an opportunity for the students to reflect on the specific content being shared directly during their weekly supervision meetings and also being

gained indirectly through exposure to new people and new work environments at their internship sites. The responses to the midterm evaluation were intended to be coded using a priori coding (Appendix E), seeking specifically to find if responses to the midterm demonstrated an increase in social and cultural capital directly from the internship experience.

The second driver measure was six of the questions included in the check-in interviews, which were semi-structured interviews with both the site supervisors and students at each internship. The check-in interviews involved a conversation with the internship site supervisor and a separate conversation with the student intern. Due to the volume of check-in interviews that needed to be completed, the researcher and the Internship Program Manager split the sites and internships, with each one completing half of the check-in interviews. To ensure consistency, both the researcher and the Internship Program Manager utilized the same list of questions and discussed the interview process during regularly weekly meetings. The check-in interviews were completed over Zoom, with the Internship Program Manager or the researcher leading the meeting. The check-in interviews used the questions in Appendix G which included yes/no questions, numerical questions, and open-ended response questions. Question five was about introductions to new people and provided a driver measure to assess increasing social capital. Question five was analyzed using percentages to determine an average of new contacts gained during the internship experiences for students. The open-ended questions numbered six and seven addressed building cultural capital in relation to industry knowledge. Questions eight through ten prompted students to provide information they felt was important about the internship experience. The open-ended questions numbered six through ten were analyzed utilizing a priori codes included in Appendix E.

Balancing Measures

In every improvement initiative, resources in the form of time and energy are directed toward the improvement and away from other areas. When either adding or moving resources to implement an initiative, the change may include unforeseen and unintended consequences, and balancing measures seek to find and document the unintended consequences of the improvement initiative (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The UNC Asheville Internship Program created consequences on the UNC Asheville campus for other internship programs already embedded in majors, for the staff of the UNC Asheville Career Center who all needed to support a new programmatic initiative, for students in the program, and for employers who were now offering internships that may be different from prior internships due to the requirements of the UNC Asheville Internship Program.

To collect information on how the UNC Asheville Internship Program affected these groups, I conducted three focus groups after the internships were complete: one focus group with UNC Asheville internship faculty and Career Center staff, one with students who participated in the program, and one focus group with site supervisors in the internship program. The focus groups used the questions in Appendix H to uncover the impacts of the UNC Asheville Internship program, both intended and unintended on the program participants and the faculty and staff at UNC Asheville. The focus groups were transcribed and then coded using inductive coding. Inductive coding is appropriate because balancing measures are unintended and therefore it is difficult to predict the type of unintended consequences (positive and negative) that may be identified in the focus groups.

Process Measures

In improvement science, process measures seek to determine if the improvement is being implemented as intended (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). One of the process measures for the UNC Asheville Internship Program was reflective memos written by the researcher after weekly meetings with the Internship Program Manager. Each week, beginning in March, the researcher wrote at least a paragraph of reflection on the program's implementation, steps completed, challenges encountered, and changes that were made and why. These memos were analyzed throughout the implementation of the UNC Asheville Internship Program by the researcher using inductive coding.

The second process measure was questions one through four in the check-in interviews with the site supervisors and students (Appendix G). As the questions were primarily yes/no questions, the data analysis was conducted using percentages: noting what had happened and what had not happened (yes/no) and averages (hours on site). Where students and site supervisors answered no to a process measure, the researcher and Internship Program Manager asked follow-up questions to gather more information on the reasons for the change and made notes during the check-in interviews. The researcher analyzed notes from the follow-up questions using inductive coding.

Results and Analysis

The results section includes an analysis of the process, driver, balancing, and outcome measures used in the UNC Asheville Internship Program's first PDSA cycle in 2024. This section begins with an overview of the participants in the program. After the results section, the implications section will discuss what the results included in this section mean for future iterations of the UNC Asheville Internship program.

Participants

Participants in the UNC Asheville Internship program included students from UNC Asheville and employers recruited by the Internship Program Manager.

Students

From application to internship completion, 28 students participated in the UNC Asheville Internship Program in Summer 2024. To be accepted into the program, students had to be currently enrolled at UNC Asheville, have completed 60 credit hours which can include transfer credits, and not have completed a prior internship; all 28 students in the program met these requirements. The year breakdown of student participants included nine sophomores, 16 juniors, and three seniors. Majors included: music, mass communication, business, accounting, new media, sociology, psychology, philosophy, mechatronics, environmental studies, and computer science.

The program could not be limited to students of lower SES due to state funding restrictions, but focused marketing to encourage students with lower SES to participate. Of the 28 interns in the program, 24 completed the pre-survey. Figure 6 and Figure 7 illustrate student participant demographics gathered in the pre-survey, which showed that 54% had an average family income of less than \$100,000 and 37% had parents/guardians who had not yet attained a four-year degree, making them first-generation four-year college students.

Figure 6

Average Total Income of Household of Origin

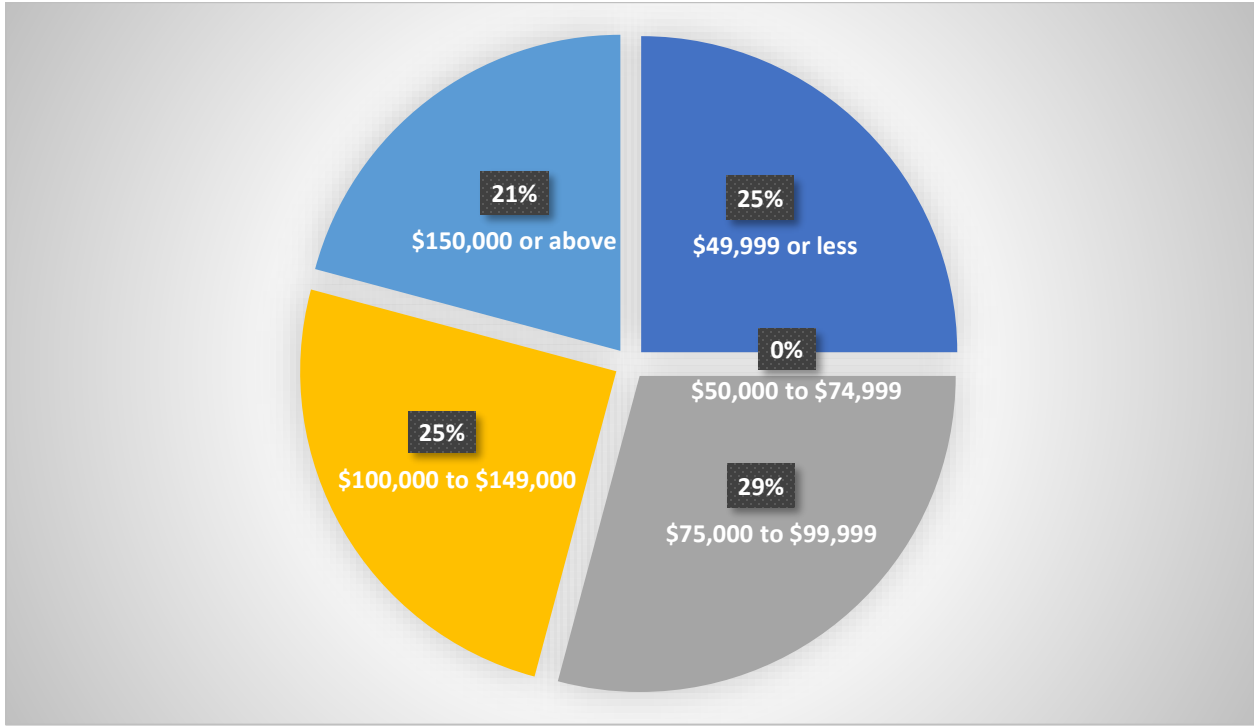
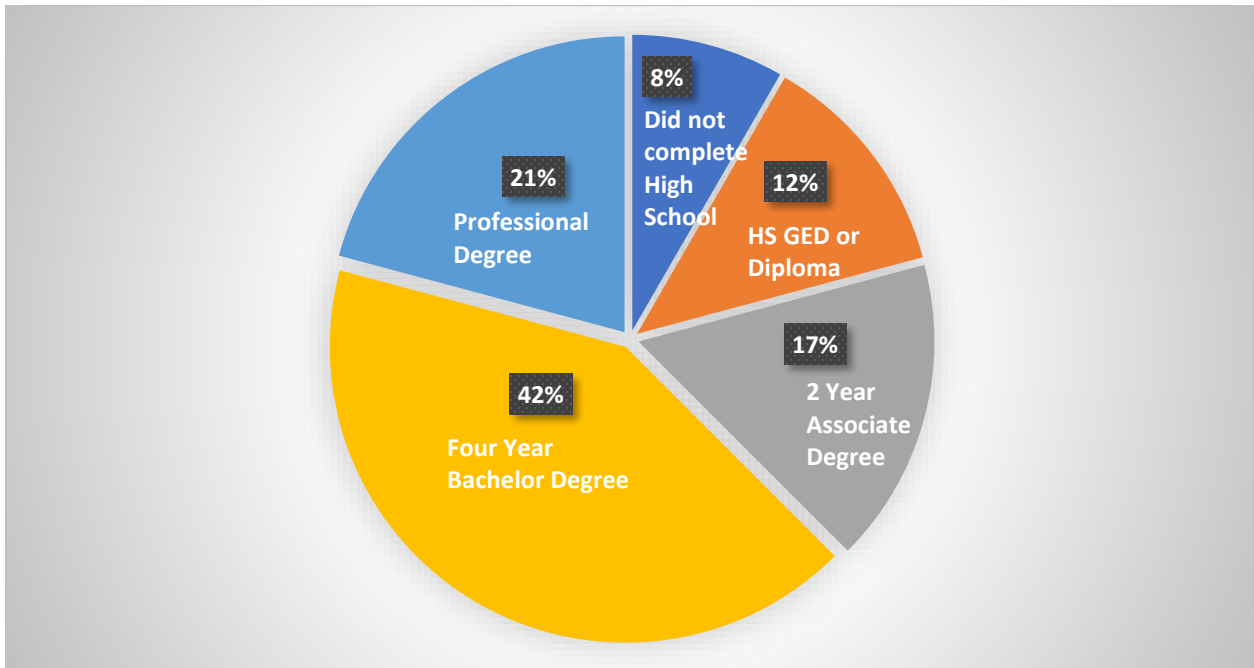


Figure 7

Highest Educational Attainment of Parents/Guardians

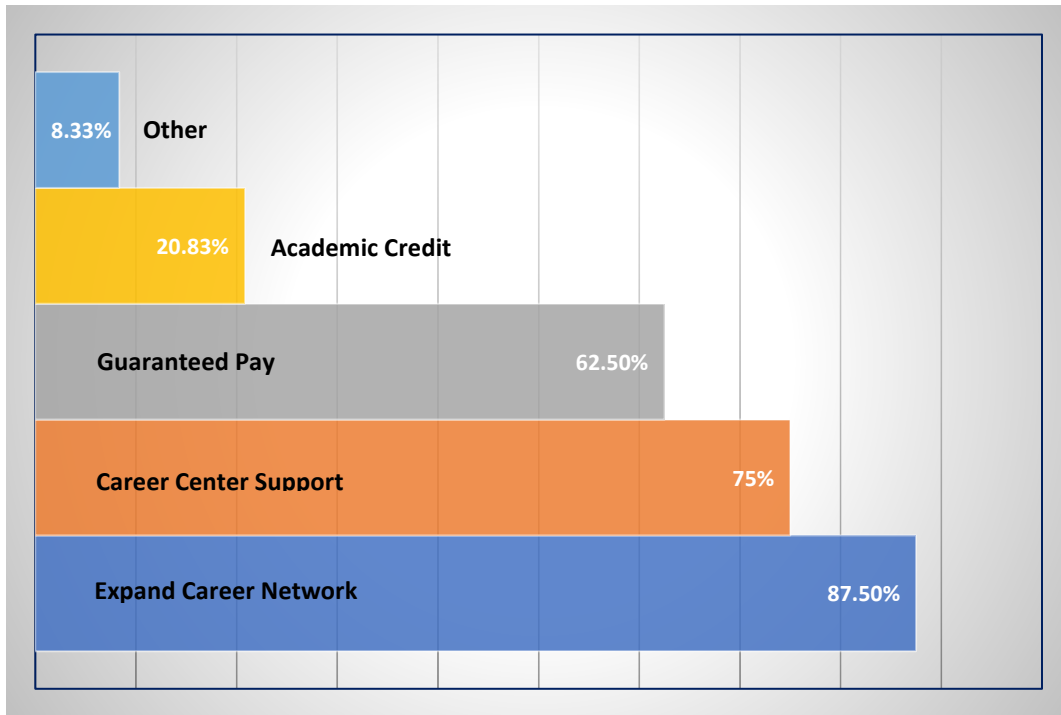


The general student population at UNC Asheville in the 2023-2024 academic year shows 24% known first-generation students, 12% unknown, and 64% not first-generation college students (UNC Asheville Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2024). 32% of students at UNC Asheville qualified for the Pell Grant in 2023-2024, where family income is typically below \$52,000 for a family of four but can be up to \$91,000 depending on application components (UNC Asheville Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning, 2024). The data from UNC Asheville Institutional Research Effectiveness and Planning does not directly match the questions asked in the pre-survey, but the demographic comparison shows that the UNC Asheville Internship Program student participants were likely of a slightly lower SES than the general population of UNC Asheville students as a whole.

The pre-survey included a question asking students their reasons for choosing to participate in the UNC Asheville Internship Program. Students could “select all that apply” and fill in an “other” answer. Figure 8 shows the breakdown with over half of the 24 students who completed the pre-survey selecting guaranteed pay (62.5%), and the majority selecting Career Center support (75%) and expand career network (87.5%). 8.33% chose “other” and wrote: “The program seemed like a great opportunity to obtain professional experience in a more career-related setting” and “Felt it was a very good opportunity to get experience with the support of the Career Center.” The desire for Career Center support aligns with the findings from national internship surveys that students find it challenging to source their own internships, especially students without high levels of social and cultural capital (Hora et al., 2021).

Figure 8

Reasons Students Chose to Participate in the UNC Asheville Internship Program



Employers

Twenty-six individual employers matched with a student intern and 24 of the employers were local to the Asheville metro region. Twenty-four sites had one intern, while two sites had two interns. Two organizations participated from other parts of North Carolina, including one in Winston-Salem with one intern and one in Charlotte with two interns working in different parts of the organization under different site supervisors. Thirteen of the sites were for-profit and 13 were nonprofit representing a range of industries including education, law, logistics, communications, banking and finance, science testing and research, music/events, hospitality, and human services.

Internships

The internships had a range of pay and hours, as pay and hours are almost impossible to standardize across industries and internship sites. 13 of the internships were paid by the employer, representing the for-profit companies. 15 of the internships were paid by UNC Asheville via the internship scholarship associated with the UNC Asheville Internship Program, representing the nonprofit employers in the program. Students paid via UNC Asheville Internship scholarship earned a flat rate of \$1500 for the summer, while students paid by their site ranged from \$12 an hour to \$20 an hour. Hours working on-site during the internship program varied, with some students working as many as 40 hours per week and others working as few as five hours per week. The UNC Asheville Internship Program recommended that students work 100 hours total on-site over the course of the summer, especially those being paid via scholarship so that their rate of pay would average around \$15 an hour. The students and employers in the program initiated their internships as planned, the following sections review the process of implementation and changes made during the program.

Process Measures

A process measure checks the fidelity of the implementation of an improvement science initiative, determining the “degree to which it was implemented as intended” (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p.141). Process measures are utilized regularly throughout the implementation (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The UNC Asheville Internship Program had two process measures: weekly researcher memos and four questions asked during the check-in interviews (Appendix G).

Weekly Memos

The first measure, weekly memos written by the researcher, noted the parts of the implementation plan occurring each week and any changes to the implementation of the program that deviated from the initial plan. Weekly memos were written after meeting with the Internship Program Manager and began in March 2024 and continued for the duration of the Do phase through August 2024. After completion, weekly memos were analyzed using inductive coding to note all changes. Following the coding of all changes, the findings were then categorized into groups based on the types of changes. The changes coded from the weekly memos fell primarily into two categories: participation and procedural.

Participation. Changes in participation throughout the program included number of interns, the design team, and the student focus group. The first difference in the improvement initiative plan versus implementation was in the number of students accepted into the program (53) who made it through the initial stages of preparation to being matched with an employer and starting their internships (28). The numbers reflect an attrition rate of over 47% from sign-up to the start of the internship. The researcher memo noted: “There were several internships that seemed very cool that students did not apply for at all, including the NC Zoo and the Asheville Tourists baseball team. We also had a student with a match drop out of their match after it was set up to take classes this summer instead, which is another question as to why.” One student reached out in late May 2024 to let us know that they eventually did receive an offer from an internship site in the program, but neither the site nor the student had let the Internship Program Manager know that they had matched, and therefore were left out of the initial round of emails to schedule student and site supervisor check-in interviews.

Two additional changes in participation occurred, one on the design team membership and the other at an internship site. In April 2024, a member of the design team left UNC Asheville due to layoffs, the Assistant Director from the Office of Multicultural Affairs. The weekly memos showed that the researcher decided not to find a replacement and add a new design team member. From April 2024 through the conclusion of the first PDSA Cycle, the design team has four members instead of five. In July 2024 a site supervisor informed the researcher that they needed to terminate their internship with their student effective immediately due to a lack of commitment from the intern and an overestimation of the intern's skills. The memos show that because the internship began and the student and site supervisor made it over halfway through the internship, the data from the internship has been included in the pre-survey and check-in interviews but omitted from the post-survey and final evaluation.

Finally, the last process change in implementation was in the final focus group for students. From the weekly memos:

The student and employer focus groups were scheduled for today, with the students at 9am and the employers at 11am. Three students RSVP'd yes to the focus group, but all of them canceled before the focus group began this morning. I think they may be tired of data collection between the pre-and post-surveys, check-in interviews and the Big Interview/final reflection at the end. If this had been part of a class and for a grade, the turnout would have been better. There is little incentive to participate in the focus group at the end, firstly because it's optional and secondly because their internship has already happened-- they got what they came for already, essentially.

The student focus group scheduled for August 7th, an optional requirement for students, saw no

students log in for Zoom. Therefore, the balancing measure of a student focus group did not happen.

Procedural. Procedural changes to the UNC Asheville Internship Program included an optional breakfast meeting, changes in site supervisors, changes to check-in interview questions, and elimination of the mid-term evaluation.

In early June, the researcher and Internship Program Manager added an optional in-person meeting for the UNC Asheville Internship Program site supervisors and interns to meet for breakfast on the UNC Asheville campus and review the weekly topics together. Event attendance was optional since it was added after the original plan of the internship program. Eight site supervisors and three students from the program attended. During the event, the Internship Program Manager led a discussion about quality internship supervision, including setting aside time for regular supervision and reviewed the weekly topics. The same day, the researcher began sending out the weekly topic emails to site supervisors and interns. The first weekly topic email prompted two site supervisors to write back and let us know about a change in the site supervisors at their sites, which they likely would not have shared without the topic email prompting that information.

During the check-in interviews, it became clear to the researcher that site supervisors were ready to talk about the skills and accomplishments of interns but found the wording of the questions on behaviors confusing. After the first four check-in interviews and conferring with the Internship Program Manager, the question was then prefaced for the remainder of the check-in interviews with examples of the types of behaviors (communication skills, etc.) that the intern was demonstrating on-site. From the researcher memo:

I have found that some of the check-in questions do not immediately make sense to site supervisors-- the student questions seem to be working just fine. The site supervisors are confused when I ask if they have shared behavioral expectations, and I end up redefining it and directing them toward easy ones like communication, attire, and timeliness. I have not figured out a better way to ask about the behaviors needed to be successful on the job since we tend to talk about that in terms of 'professionalism' instead of 'cultural capital'.

Similarly, questions for students about employers and jobs needed to be prefaced. While students were able to answer the behavioral questions during the check-in interviews without additional prompts, they needed a preface to answer questions about potential employers. The researcher found that asking about career goals first helped students to answer questions about employers and jobs as some interns were in internships in fields adjacent to or outside of their intended career paths.

The process of scheduling and executing 56 check-in interviews with site supervisors and interns went through the end of June and into early July 2024. At this point, the midterm evaluation was scheduled to be sent out to students. However, the researcher noticed how closely the questions on the midterm evaluation resembled the questions students had been asked only two weeks before during the check-in interviews and determined that students would not have made measurable progress building social and cultural capital during the two-week interval between the check-in interview and written midterm evaluation. From the memos:

The data collection included a midterm short answer evaluation to be sent on July 1 and returned by students on July 8th, but after reviewing it, many of the questions were very similar to the questions [the Internship Program Manager] and I just asked in the check-

in interviews. I felt that students would find the request to answer the questions again, but in writing, tedious and annoying. Therefore, I paused sending out the evaluation, and instead touched base with Dr. Bellara (new PI and new DQ Chair) on July 8th to discuss not doing the midterm evaluation at all. During that conversation Dr. Bellara agreed that it would be too much to ask and respectful of participants to not send this part of the data collection. As a driver measure it would not have provided insight that the check-in interviews did not provide.

The midterm evaluation also ran the risk of students finding the data collection annoying and redundant. Therefore, the researcher decided to eliminate the midterm evaluation measure.

Check-in Questions

The second process measure was the first four questions of the check-in interviews, including the number of hours per week each intern worked, if the internship was remote, hybrid, or in person, how many professionals the intern had been introduced to, and if the site supervisors were using the weekly topics to guide supervision meetings. Numerical answers to these questions were captured by the researcher during the coding of the check-in interviews and recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. Twenty-two of the interns and 18 of the site supervisors took part in the check-in interviews.

At the time of the check-in interviews 45% percent of students and 44% of site supervisors (10 interns, 8 site supervisors) reported that they had not yet started using the weekly topics during supervision, while 55% of students and 56% of site supervisors (12 students and 10 site supervisors) reported regularly utilizing the weekly topics during supervision. The question about the weekly supervision topics provided a reminder to all of the site supervisors to begin using the topics if they had not yet.

Most of the internships took place in person, with 72% of students reporting their work was fully in-person (13 students) and two reporting hybrid work for a total of 83% (15 students) with in-person contact at their sites. Students worked a wide range of hours (from 5 to 40 hours per week) during their internships as seen in Table 2, with a median of 16 hours per week and an average of 17.5 hours per week.

Table 2

Internship hours worked per week

Min.	Max.	Mean	Range	Median	Mode
5	40	17.5	35	16	20

Note. All interns reported their time on site in whole hours, but some offered a typical range. For students who stated a range in the check-in interview, the researcher used the number in the middle of the range. Students who reported working 40 hours per week interned at the for-profit internship sites and were compensated hourly.

During the check-in interviews, students and site supervisors reported a range in the number of professionals the interns had met during their time at the internship site. As a process measure, the question about introductions to professionals was a critical component of the internship intended to build students' social capital. The weekly topic (Appendix A) sent out a week before the first check-in interviews was the topic asking site supervisors to introduce their interns to a professional outside of their current internship site. The introductions also serve as a driver measure and will be revisited in the driver measure section. Table 3 shows that students

were introduced to between 1 and 35 professionals by the time of the check-in interviews, with a median of 8 and a mode and average of 10.

Table 3

Number of Introductions to Professionals

Min.	Max.	Mean	Range	Median	Mode
1	35	10	34	8	10

Note. The numbers include internal introductions at the internship site and external introductions to professionals outside of the internship site. For students who stated a range in the check-in interview, the researcher used the number in the middle of the range.

The process measures demonstrate that at the time of the check-in interviews, most of the internships were being initiated as intended with interns working hours appropriate for their site and being introduced to professionals internal and external to their internship site. The reported use of the weekly topics was lower than expected and intended.

Driver Measures

In an improvement project, the driver measure provides a check during the implementation process to determine if the intervention is functioning as an improvement before the outcome measure is available (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). For the UNC Asheville Internship Program, the driver measures were six of the questions in the check-in interviews (Appendix G) and the midterm evaluation (Appendix F). As discussed in the overview of implementation and process measures section, the midterm evaluation was eliminated due to the quick turnaround

after completing the check-in interviews and concerns about data collection fatigue among participants. The questions informing the driver measure asked:

- the number of people students had been introduced to both inside and outside of their internship site
- what had been shared about the job market and potential employers
- what students learned about themselves in terms of behavioral expectations and ‘fit’
- challenges, and successes in the internship so far

For site supervisors, the questions about challenges and success were similar, but the questions about behavioral expectations and introductions asked about the actions the site supervisor had taken to share information and connections with their student intern.

The check-in interviews were conducted and recorded over Zoom for ease of data collection. Analysis of the check-in interviews used a priori coding with the codes defined in Appendix E. During the coding process, the researcher wrote coding memos to note insights and additional information. The check-in interviews for the UNC Asheville Internship Program were built to check for growth in social and cultural capital during the internship. The questions developed for the check-in interviews were based on the questions in the pre-and post-survey. The check-in interviews allowed for a process measure and a driver measure to occur together and gave an opportunity for the researcher and Internship Program Manager to intervene and guide the site supervisors and interns to focus on social and cultural capital if they had not yet.

Eighteen site supervisors completed the check-in interviews and agreed to be recorded and anonymously quoted. Due to confidentiality concerns, two of our for-profit site supervisors declined to participate, one at a law firm and one at a bank. Twenty-two students participated in the check-in interviews, and 20 consented to be recorded and anonymously quoted. While all of

the check-in interviews happened in the second half of the month of June 2024, one student had been interning since May 2024, 24 had started in early June 2024 and three started in mid-June. Most students had been working on-site for at least three weeks at the time of their check-in interview.

Social Capital

The first three a priori codes are associated with social capital: employers, jobs, and connections (Appendix E). As seen in Table 4 the majority of site supervisors talked about social capital in terms of connections (21), rather than jobs (4) and employers (3).

Table 4*Site Supervisor Check-In Interviews A Priori Codes*

A priori code	n of participants contributing (N=18)	n of transcript excerpts assigned	Sample Quote
Employers	3	3	<i>“She's not sure if she was kind of interested in the nonprofit path, so, you know, we've talked about that versus government.”</i>
Jobs	4	4	<i>“I've told her, if she wants a job after her internship, we would take her in a heartbeat.”</i>
Connections	15	21	<i>“I've set up some meetings for her. She's probably gotten to meet 50% of the staff so far, and both in social settings as well as in, you know, more formal work, one-on-one settings.”</i>
Personal Development	8	9	<i>“I think like she's growing in that realm of just like the knowledge of what tools people in these fields are using, and in what ways, and how can I utilize that for myself.”</i>
Cultural Fit	16	31	<i>“Most of our staff is kind of like head down, work hard, you know, kind of take care of things. And she fits in really well with that. So behaviorally, yeah, we communicate that kind of, this is the expectation. This is the standard that we have.”</i>
Confidence	6	6	<i>“She wanted to work on feeling confident speaking in front of people, and I think that our Saturday time together, facilitating outside has made [Student Name] a more comfortable facilitator.”</i>

As most internships were in their first few weeks, many site supervisors had not yet discussed with their interns potential jobs and employers within their industry. The few who had discussed it mentioned explaining how their industry differs from other industries and shared efforts to expose their student intern to other organizations within the field. For jobs, most

transcript excerpts assigned were about wanting to retain their student intern after the internship was complete.

Like their site supervisors, interns also did not discuss the employer code in great detail during their check-in interviews. As seen in Table 5, for the interns who mentioned the employer code (6), the growth ranged from knowing who to talk to for more information, how their organization fits within an industry, and wanting to stay at their current internship site after the internship ended.

Table 5*Student Intern Check-In Interviews A Priori Codes*

A priori code	n of participants contributing (N=22)	n of transcript excerpts assigned	Sample Quote
Employers	6	6	<i>“I like the idea of working as like an environmental specialist in a lab setting, but I guess I just, I don't really know what the options are in water quality testing.”</i>
Jobs	12	17	<i>“I now know I can kind of break into commercial lending. I know what it looks like. I know what the kind of goals are with it.”</i>
Connections	18	26	<i>“Five or six partners, and they come to events, and they come and help out whenever they can, so they come in and out, and I've met them and talked with them, and they've told me some of what they do, and I've helped them out.”</i>
Personal Development	16	21	<i>“Learning different software here and there, and the best ways to like go about getting certain work done and learning, like, how to prioritize. Like, okay, like this should come first before I do this project and that sort of thing.”</i>
Cultural Fit	16	26	<i>“I'd say there is a bit of an expectation to have, like the ability to learn things very quickly and pick up on instructions quickly and not have to constantly look at written directions. And I feel like I've been doing pretty well at that so far.”</i>
Confidence	13	18	<i>“Another success I would say is I feel like I've gotten pretty comfortable with, like, emailing other people in foundation that are not just like in the communications department.”</i>

Students spoke more about jobs, with 17 transcript excerpts assigned across 12 student interviews. Some interns entered the internship with a defined career path that solidified through their internship experience up to the check-in interview; others entered the internship with career ideas that grew as they learned more about potential jobs in their field. Interns mentioned that site supervisors, coworkers, and volunteers at their site all played a role in employer and job knowledge growth and career exploration for interns.

Connections is the social capital code with the most transcript excerpts assigned for site supervisors (21) and interns (26). A few weeks into the internship, most of the site supervisors reported that their intern had met either all or most of the employees at their site. Interns in positions that were externally facing had met more people outside of their organization than interns with internal-facing responsibilities. Several students talked about getting to know people outside of their organization through events the organization was running, including partnerships with associations. For some interns, external events were part of their jobs, but for others the invitation to attend external networking events came through their site supervisors.

As mentioned in the process measure section, the check-in interviews provided a reminder to the site supervisors to introduce the intern to someone who works in the field outside of their organization. Some site supervisors discussed their strategy for future introductions, including having already identified a person to introduce the intern to or asking the intern what type of person they would like to meet. One student said of their site supervisor: “She's like, really putting me in contact with [industry connection] so that I can continue and kind of work with them in the fall a little bit. So she's really helping us with, like, what we're interested in and where we want to go.” For most interns, the site supervisor served as their most important connection at their internship site, with students reporting that they viewed them as the person

most able to open doors and create introductions to others both within the organization and outside of the organization.

For students working with coworkers in addition to their site supervisor, the relationship building in the downtime/quiet between work projects offered deeper learning about the industry and field. One student mentioned building a relationship with a temp at their site who had connections in their field to find out more about the industry and connect with the professional on LinkedIn. Another talked about deepening a relationship with someone subbing in for the primary person they work with on projects and learning about that person's years in the industry. At one site, an alumna from UNC Asheville made a special effort to get to know the two interns at the site, taking them out to lunch and showing a special interest in them. Both interns mentioned the connection with the alumna as a highlight during their check-in interviews. The relationships built on-site made a difference in interns building social capital.

Cultural Capital

The second three a priori codes are associated with cultural capital: personal development, cultural fit, and confidence. Table 4 shows that site supervisors spoke more to cultural fit with 31 transcript excerpts assigned, and considerably less to personal development (9) and confidence (6). Site supervisors talked about the expectations they set for interns on communication and attire, with one site supervisor discussing the nuance of dressing professionally for a job that is outdoors and in rivers. Two site supervisors shared that their interns prompted them to explain their behavioral expectations at the start of the internship and that the questions during the check-in interviews helped site supervisors think about what they needed to share with their interns.

Several site supervisors talked about the behaviors that students brought with them as assets to the organization, without having to be shared as an expectation of the internship. Examples included interns being “proactive,” “inquisitive,” “punctual,” “intentional,” “an active listener,” “detail-oriented,” “hardworking,” and engaging in “formal communication.” Some site supervisors talked about their interns’ behavior in vague language, such as “appropriate” and “professional,” without defining what those words mean in the context of their organizations. Using the terms without defining them seems to imply that everyone understands their meaning, but since professional and appropriate can change from setting to setting, using the terms without definition can lead to confusion for students who may not know what is being implied at their site. The best example of talking about cultural fit without being clear came from a site supervisor about their approach to the interview with the intern:

I was just telling [Student Name], like, some of the stuff about interviews and expectations. I was like, in all of my experiences, I said, I really think it's like a vibe fit. I said, you can have your resume match up, but you interview with the place and you guys aren't the same vibes.

The example of ‘vibe fit’ illustrates how much cultural capital is often implicit rather than explicit, and potentially difficult to communicate. Vibe is defined as “a distinctive feeling or quality capable of being sensed” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The site supervisor here defines hiring decision-making as a ‘sense’ of whether a person will fit in at an organization based on the interview conversation, which makes ‘fit’ difficult to discuss in specifics.

Site supervisors did not touch much on confidence (6) or personal development (9), which may be because it can be difficult to observe and share where someone other than yourself has experienced a change in confidence or personal development. The themes shared here

centered around interns' growth in skills during the internship and observable instances of interns taking initiative. One site supervisor discussed their intern's growth in comfort with facilitating educational for groups at the museum and another talked about an intern taking on opportunities for public speaking that were outside of their comfort zone and how proud the site supervisor was of them for making that choice. Others shared that their interns seemed to be more confident in utilizing web tools, creating videos, and using PowerPoint and Excel. A favorite example is the site supervisor who noted that their intern had created a "google doc of the stuff she learned" so far in her internship.

Interns spent more time discussing all three codes related to cultural capital than their site supervisors as shown in Table 5. Students expressed personal development in terms of skills currently mastered and skills they want to learn during the remainder of their internship and after. Interns mentioned soft skills, including how to prioritize and organize work projects. Comments included learning to be flexible in their internship as the demands of the day may be significantly different than what they had anticipated and learning to go with the flow, showing that the adjustment to the internship itself was viewed as personal development, well-captured in this quote:

I've learned that I have a tendency to take whatever prompt they give me and try to bring it 1000 miles further regardless of whether they wanted me to do that or not. And at first I thought, Oh, that's great. They'll love that I'm doing so much more work, until I spent, I think, three days, no so, two and a half days last week where I got no sleep because I was putting so many hours into making sure I got this project done, which they did not want me to do. So I think that was something I've been again, slowly piecing together.

Students described growth in cultural fit in terms of learning the unspoken expectations on the job through trial and error. Many talked about being nervous at the beginning of the internship compared to the check-in interview completed a few weeks into their time on site. Students also talked about learning how their internship environment differs from a school environment: “It's more like, when people get into the field, the corrections can be made at the last minute. And so that's something I've kind of had to retrain my brain on, coming from a school environment to a work one.” Another had been unsure if they would like their internship and was pleasantly surprised at how much they loved the work. Interns also spoke about finding that they like variety in their work, with one specific example about enjoying moving from lab work to field work. The adjustment from classroom to work served as an important theme within the cultural capital codes for students.

Confidence had significant overlap with the learning expressed in personal development and cultural fit. Students talked about personal development and skills learned in terms of confidence in building those skills. Students also talked about gaining confidence on-site when learning how to follow the spoken and unspoken expectations of the site. The researcher coded confidence separately, but it became difficult to determine where the overlap between where the cultural capital codes leaned towards confidence rather than personal development or cultural fit. An example here: “Another success I would say is I feel like I've gotten pretty comfortable with, like, emailing other people in foundation that are not just like in the communications department”. The excerpt, also used as an example in Table 5 above, is coded as confidence because of the emphasis on growing in comfort, but knowing how to email other people could also be cultural fit or personal development. One student did a nice job of summarizing what growth in confidence looked like for many of the responses from the check-in interviews: “I

think I've learned, like, it's easy to kind of doubt yourself when you're starting something new, but like, having faith in my own abilities.” As students grew in cultural fit and personal development, they also grew in confidence. ‘Fit’ by itself is used as shorthand for employers when describing cultural capital (Hora, 2017), so it makes sense that as students grew in cultural fit and personal development, they felt more confident at their internship site. The check-in interviews showed that cultural capital is nuanced and implicit and grew for interns in the first few weeks of the UNC Asheville Internship Program.

Balancing Measures

A balancing measure tests to see if the improvement initiative worked as intended and whether or not it created unintended consequences for participants and for others in the organization outside of the program (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The balance measures for the UNC Asheville Internship Program were three focus groups at the end of the internship program, in August 2024. The first focus group was with students who completed the program, the second was with site supervisors who participated in the internship program, and the third was with faculty and staff at UNC Asheville who were not a part of the internship program but due to their work in experiential learning and other internships at the university, may have been impacted by the internship program.

The questions for focus groups are included in Appendix H and designed to uncover the unknown impacts of the program. To facilitate ease of attendance and transcription, focus group participants were convened using Zoom. All site supervisors and students in the internship program who had previously completed the informed consent received separate focus group calendar invitations with Zoom links. Faculty and staff at UNC Asheville were identified and invited in the same way, via a calendar invite with a Zoom link.

Of the 18 site supervisors invited, five site supervisors chose to attend the employer focus group. Of the 24 students invited, none chose to attend the student focus group. Of the 20 invited for the faculty and staff focus group, nine chose to attend. The demographics of participants of each group will be discussed in greater detail in the focus group sections below. All focus groups were analyzed using inductive coding in the first round, with themes defined and checked in the second round of coding.

Faculty and staff focus group. Participants in the faculty and staff focus group included faculty who run their own internships for academic credit within their majors: psychology, environmental studies, mass communication, languages and literatures (Spanish), and business. None of these internship courses are required to graduate and all are offered as one option among other experiential learning opportunities for credit including a consulting practicum (business), and undergraduate research (environmental studies and psychology). Two internship courses are truly optional internships for academic credit, mass communication and languages and literatures (Spanish). All faculty in the focus group work with the Career Center at UNC Asheville to varying degrees to help their students find organizations for internships, with psychology partnering the least due to the clinical nature of their academic internship program, and business partnering the most because of the volume of students who opt-in for business internships. Each internship program has its own structure and requirements with psychology and business having the most rigorous requirements. Business requires the most interaction with internship sites to set up the internship in advance.

Not present at this focus group, but invited to attend, are members of our Academic Success Center and Advising Center, including the registrar. These staff work with students to help them secure academic credit for internships by sourcing the right faculty and courses to earn

credit. The two Career Center staff who attended the focus group, other than the Internship Program Manager and the researcher, did not directly work on the internship program. The Associate Director for Career Education works with students in classroom presentations and coaching appointments and the Associate Director for Employer Relations works with employers to recruit on campus. While participating Career Center staff members may come in contact with the internship program in their day-to-day work, their work is primarily supporting students outside of the program to find internships, part-time jobs, and full-time work.

From the outset of the focus group, it became clear that not all participants were well-versed in the newly implemented UNC Asheville Internship Program. One of our faculty supporters from mass communication answered the first question with perspectives on support for finding internship employers from the Career Center in general, not in the context of the UNC Asheville Internship Program. The support was positive, and as a balancing measure, it demonstrates that information on the UNC Asheville Internship Program has not yet fully permeated the campus. As a start for the focus group, the faculty member's response provided an opportunity for the researcher to fully introduce the program. The conversation among participants then highlighted ways in which the program could support internship courses by having students complete a more general (not necessarily major-focused) internship through the Career Center before pursuing internship courses within their major, like the clinically focused psychology internship. The focus group also brought attention to the different ways that faculty source sites (or do not) for internship courses within their majors, an important topic ripe for exploration at UNC Asheville in future years.

As a balance measure, the focus group with faculty and staff uncovered unknown and unintended consequences and underscored the intended positive outcomes of the UNC Asheville

Internship Program. The business faculty member spent more time than the other faculty in the focus group working directly with the Internship Program Manager and shared most of the unintended consequences. The business faculty member offered four consequences to consider:

- 1) First of all, the thing I came up against and spent kind of a lot of my time untangling was the students were confused about the difference between the Career Center's "internship program", air quotes used there, and our disciplinary internship course program.

In the focus group, three faculty agreed they also spoke with students who were confused, but only one found it problematic. One faculty member noted that they did not experience confusion with their students.

- 2) Number two, there was employer confusion over the career center program and our disciplinary requirements. And again, I spent time, you know, untangling that for employers, and [Internship Program Manager] again was wonderful... I felt like I was almost in competition with the Career Center for employers because the employers would then get on that list, and then they were kind of gone to me.
- 3) And then there were some double requirements that were a bit of a problem... the employers are getting two requests from two different-- they're getting career center requests, and they're getting requests from me for like evals, midterm and evals at the end.

The final point shared by the business faculty member included concerns about not offering the UNC Asheville Internship Program every semester, as the program is planned for future iterations to run in the spring and summer semesters only.

- 4) There were no fall internships offered, and of course we do fall and spring and summer. So for us it would have been more beneficial to have students set up for internships for the fall.

After offering the four areas of critique, the business faculty member reiterated their support for the program and their view of the program as positive momentum for internships at UNC Asheville. The business faculty member offered that many of these challenges can be overcome by an even deeper partnership with all faculty who work on internships saying, "I just so appreciate your continued cooperation because I can't speak for the other departments, but probably I can. We couldn't do it without you."

After hearing about unintended challenges, a Career Center staff member offered positive outcomes within her work with students outside of the internship program:

The financial support that's offered through that is huge. There are students that cannot afford to do an internship unpaid at all. And so they come into the career center and ask what their options are. And so it's nice to be able to offer something that says, hey, there is an option that exists if it's potentially something that you can manage.

The staff member found the financial benefit and structure to be a positive outcome for students. The staff member also appreciated having a designated person in the Internship Program Manager who she can directly refer a student with significant barriers to pursuing an internship, either a lack of confidence, a lack of financial resources, or both: "and it's been really wonderful to be able to offer an option to students, but also to be able to see them get a high touch, high level of support that some of them truly do need to be successful in an internship." The benefit of having a referral source for internships may expand outside of the Career Center staff member.

One of the faculty introduced to the program during the focus group noted that they can “see it being totally complimentary” to the current internship course offerings within their academic department, particularly highlighting the structure of the program as a benefit for students who are unsure where to start and how to find an internship. An environmental studies faculty member who has a large internship program within their major, where experiential learning is required but the internship is one of two or three options, saw the push to have a more expansive internship program across majors as a way to encourage students to be more aware of the importance of doing internships.

I think it's really helped increase awareness of internships among students. Because you know, I think it's common for students to have multiple internships during their undergraduate time. And so there's space for a career center one and an environmental studies separate one. All those sorts of things. So I think I have more advisees now in my role as an advisor that come and are thinking about internship early on. And so I think that messaging like the increased messaging, I think, is really good for them.

A psychology faculty member chimed in to agree that students completing more internships is better and expressed a desire to see even more students completing internships, for academic credit within the major or not. The business faculty member agreed and added that faculty cannot reach the goal of more internships alone. The environmental studies faculty member requested more materials to use with students during advising to highlight the UNC Asheville Internship Program. Another unintended benefit of the UNC Asheville Internship Program shared by the Career Center Associate Director for Career Education included access to internships for athletes with challenging schedules and for neurodivergent students who may need help identifying internship sites that are more accommodating to neurodivergence.

Employer Focus Group. Participants in the employer focus group included five site supervisors, all from non-profits who received funding from UNC Asheville. Areas represented included: human resources for an NPR station, legal aid services, the communications arm of an environmental nonprofit, an educational museum, and a small environmental quality laboratory.

The focus group conversation centered primarily on the structure of the UNC Asheville Internship Program, including the unique components of check-in interviews and weekly topics. Site supervisors appreciated the check-in interviews as a method to keep communication lines open with UNC Asheville, the weekly topics, and the structure of the matching process. One site supervisor shared that the structure of the internship program encouraged the internship site to consider projects for the intern before bringing them in and that made the experience more beneficial for both the site and the intern. Several of the sites regularly offer their own internship programs to students separately from university partnerships and one site supervisor shared that the UNC Asheville Internship Program “was helpful in that respect, too, to help us think about how to do our own program better.” Later in the conversation, she followed up with more detail to add:

this engagement was necessary to give us the impetus for broader reflection about all the ways that we work with universities, colleges, summer programs, or otherwise in classes. And I think it's the structure of the new UNCA program sort of lent itself to me, thinking more about that, and how we can, year-round, figure out how to incorporate a very mutually beneficial engagement with universities, whether it be around a classroom setting and have sort of an ongoing way that we can easily integrate.

The site supervisors agreed that they appreciated the weekly topics for supervision as it added structure. The weekly topics also allowed one site supervisor to make explicit for their intern the

growth that was taking place in the internship and teach the intern how to share that in future interviews:

It was also a way for me to reinforce to her, you know, so many of these skills that you're going to be asked for, you already are using here. And these are exact, like, I would give her exact examples of things that she is doing with us, that she should be putting on her resume.

This quote is a good example of sharing cultural capital with their student intern for the benefit of securing a job in the field. The site supervisor emphasized not just the learning happening on the job, but how it can be applied in other settings within the industry. The learning is human capital and the emphasis on how to apply the skills in other settings and how to talk about the skills on a resume is cultural capital.

The site supervisors in the focus group also mentioned using the weekly topics at their organizations with other employees:

I really enjoyed the weekly questions. I mean, there were things that I had thought about because I'm in charge of onboarding people, but I really appreciated those, and in fact, captured some of them for our own onboarding project with new employees.

The quote suggests that there is value in making the sharing of social and cultural capital explicit for more than interns, it may be beneficial for current employees as well. New employees during on-boarding may benefit from learning the unspoken behavioral expectations of a work setting (cultural capital) to set them up for success on the job.

One site supervisor felt that the interns from the UNC Asheville Internship program were more bought-in than those in other programs and not treating the internship like a class but treating the internship as the next step in their career:

I find that the students coming through the career center have been very much more like a job opportunity than a class. you know. They take it more seriously, like they have the resume and the cover letter, and they take the interview like super seriously, which I really appreciate.

The sentiment that UNC Asheville Internship Program interns were better prepared than prior interns taking internship classes was reinforced by another site supervisor in the focus group:

I wanted to say, I've been pleasantly surprised at the level of intern that we've gotten through the career center. She has not waited for someone to tell her what to do. She has like gone and found projects and worked with other members of our team to like you know, come up with ideas and make things happen. So that has been wonderful, you know, compared to some of the other internships, things that I've worked with.

Several mentioned unexpected benefits of their specific intern including “a beautiful voice,” “takes initiative and completes projects the site had been putting off,” and the general benefits of interns overall: “They always just bring energy. Curiosity. Questions that make you think, yeah, why do we do it that way? So the energy and the creativity and the, you know, just positive vibe is very, very positive and rewarding.”

As all the site supervisors on the call received UNC Asheville funding for their intern, they agreed that:

Another non-negligible benefit of working with you guys is your help with funding and paying those students. I have a problem with unpaid internships. And so you all being able to help a little nonprofit fund those students to do the work. And I think they really appreciated that.

While the majority of the focus group discussed anticipated and unanticipated benefits of participation, the internship program was not without its challenges for sites. The first challenge voiced by a site supervisor was about confusing the UNC Asheville Internship Program with another internship program run by the Career Center at UNC Asheville (an annual grant-funded internship program for 20 students local to North Carolina). The site supervisor asked for more clarification about the types of internship programs offered through UNC Asheville. Another site supervisor expressed a challenge in not knowing the right number of hours a student should be working. Site supervisors appreciated the pay for students working at nonprofit organizations, but also thought it was too low. The site supervisor illustrated with this example:

Expectations were around number of hours per week and length of the internship. And I think I realized, as we went through, or you know, near the beginning that it was customized to each employer and each student. But some parameters around that would have been kind of interesting. For example, my intern did about 30 to 35 hours a week. She came into the office twice a week. The other intern from UNC Asheville did maybe 15 hours a week and rarely came into the office. And so I think, if, as the employer, if we had known kind of like all of those parameters were possible we might have done a better job upfront of setting expectations.”

The challenges from site supervisors centered on communication about the internship program and can be addressed with better communication moving forward. Better communication may include more clearly introducing the details of the program in initial phone calls and addressing differences in program requirements among different internship programs from the start.

Additionally, creating a page on the Career Center website which highlights the differences in each program will also help. It is worth considering that a more specific name than “UNC

Asheville Internship Program” will help to differentiate this program from others and allow for stronger communication about the requirements of this program.

Outcome Measures

Outcome measures happen “after the fact” and are measured after the implementation of the improvement initiative is complete (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020, p.139). The outcome measure shows if the improvement initiative worked and had the intended effect (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). The UNC Asheville Internship program had two outcome measures: a pre- and post-survey (Appendix C) and a final reflection (Appendix D).

Pre- and Post-Survey

Interns in the UNC Asheville Internship Program received the pre-survey in May 2024 and 24 interns completed the pre-survey. The post-survey was administered in August 2024 and 24 interns completed the post-survey. Nineteen interns completed both the pre- and post-survey. The pre-survey included demographic questions to determine generally the SES of students who chose to participate in the UNC Asheville Internship Program. The demographics related to SES are covered at the beginning of the results section. The pre- and post-surveys then repeated the same questions from Tomlinson et al. (2022) graduate employability capitals survey sections on social and cultural capital. For the 19 students who took the pre- and post-surveys, a dependent t-test was run using the statistical software SPSS to determine if the UNC Asheville Internship Program affected social and cultural capital. The first seven questions aligned with social capital and the second seven questions aligned with cultural capital. Each set of 7 questions was run as a separate dependent t-test to isolate each type of graduate capital.

The first research question for this analysis is “does the UNC Asheville Internship Program affect social capital outcome scores?” The result of the dependent t-test will help us

understand if the UNC Asheville Internship Program was an improvement for interns' social capital.

The null hypothesis is: $H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2$

The alternate hypothesis is: $H_1 : \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$

The pre-survey had a sample mean of 30.42 (SD=3.37) and the post-survey had a sample mean of 33.57 (SD=4.22). The dependent samples t-test indicated that the means were significantly different for the pre and post-survey ($t=-3.203$, $df=18$, $p=.005$). Thus, the null hypothesis that the UNC Asheville Internship Program does not affect social capital is rejected at the .005 level of significance. The effect size d was $-.73$. Using Cohen's guidelines, this is a moderate effect.

The second research question for this analysis is "does the UNC Asheville Internship Program affect cultural capital outcome scores?" The result of the dependent t-test will help us understand if the UNC Asheville Internship Program was an improvement for interns' cultural capital.

The null hypothesis is: $H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2$

The alternate hypothesis is: $H_1 : \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$

The pre-survey had a sample mean of 34.05 (SD=3.61) and the post-survey had a sample mean of 35.42 (SD=3.56). The dependent samples t-test indicated that the means were significantly different for the pre-and post-survey ($t=-2.269$, $df=18$, $p=.036$). Thus, the null hypothesis that the UNC Asheville Internship Program does not affect cultural capital as measured by the pre- and post-survey is rejected at the .036 level of significance. The effect size d was $-.520$. Using Cohen's guidelines, this is a moderate effect. The pre- and post-survey

dependent t-tests on social and cultural capital showed that the UNC Asheville Internship Program had a positive effect on students' social and cultural capital.

The pre-survey also included a “select all that apply” question asking interns what they hoped to gain from the UNC Asheville Internship program. The post-survey asked a mirrored question for interns to “select all that apply” for what they felt the primary outcomes from the UNC Asheville Internship Program had been for them. From these two questions, we can compare what interns intended to gain from the program with their perceived outcomes. The answers to these questions were measured by frequency. The results from the 19 interns who completed both the pre-and post-surveys can be seen in the bar graphs in Figure 9 and Figure 10. The options for select all that apply questions can be mapped to the social and cultural capital from Tomlinson et al.'s (2022) graduate employability capitals with improve resume, improve job skills, and improve interview skills mapping to cultural capital and increased career network, understand hiring process, and understand day to day of job mapping to social capital.

Figure 9

What Students Hoped to Get from the UNC Asheville Internship Program

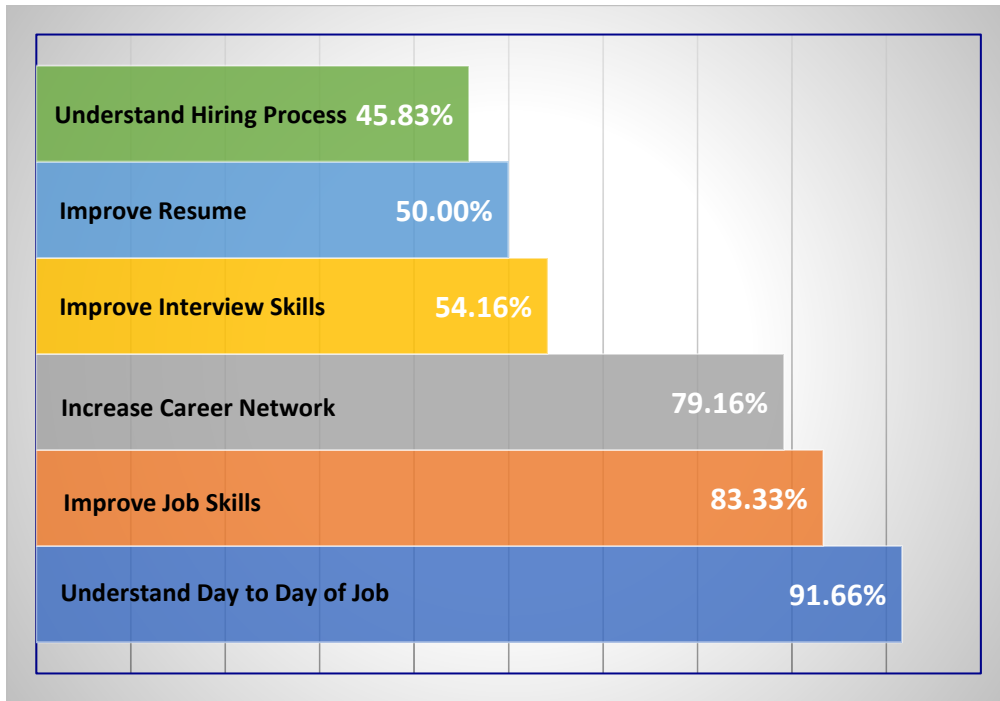
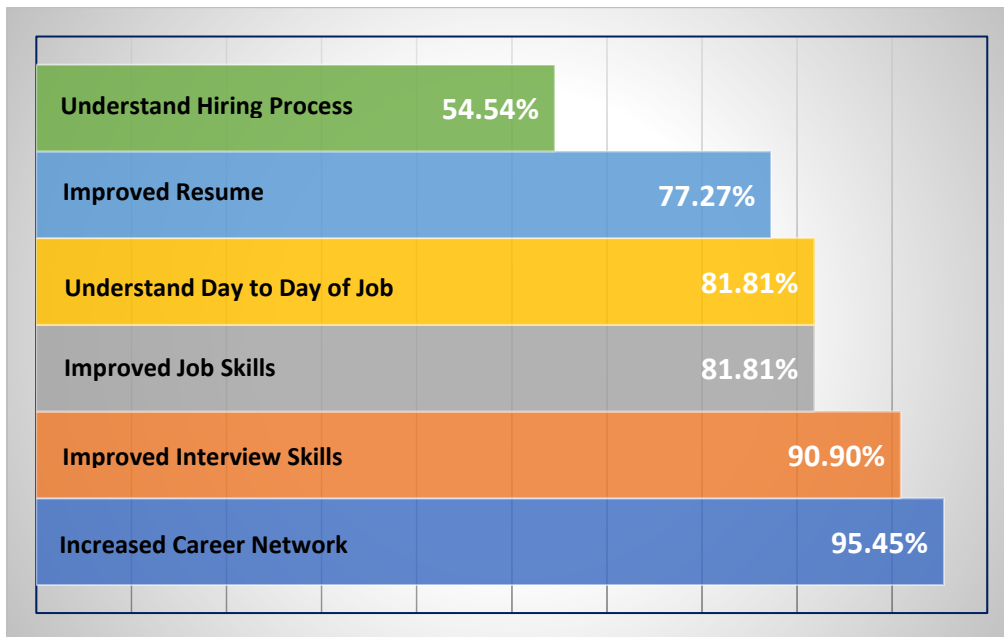


Figure 10

Primary Outcomes Students Reported in the UNC Asheville Internship Program



The survey questions cannot tell us an effect size, or a true comparison between the six outcomes, but we can learn about what interns went in hoping to get out of their internship and what they saw as the primary outcomes of the internship. A large majority of interns (91.66%) hoped to gain a better understanding of the day-to-day of the job where they were interning, and most reported that as a primary outcome (81.81%). The change in percentage here is small, but it is still a decrease in primary intention versus primary outcome. We do not have data on why this was not as high of a primary outcome, but it may be because other areas increased replacing this as a primary outcome, at the end of the internship learning about the day to day felt less important than it did in the beginning.

Interns also hoped to increase their career network (79.16%), and almost all of the interns who completed the pre- and post-survey said at the end of the internship that increasing their career network was a primary outcome of the internship (95.45%) further supporting the findings on social capital as a benefit of The UNC Asheville Internship Program. The increase in network as a primary outcome potentially points to the increased importance that students place on growing their network throughout the internship and thereafter.

Finally, the biggest difference in pre and post are in responses to improving interview skills as a primary outcome. Interview skills are a form of cultural capital, and while only 54% of students hoped to improve their interview skills, it was the second-highest reported primary outcome of the internship at 90.9%. Students felt through their participation in the internship program that they had increased their ability to interview for jobs, a critical component of the job search and a signifier of cultural capital. The results from the two select-all-that-apply questions support the finding that the UNC Asheville Internship program increased students' social and

cultural capital, but it also seemed to increase the importance that students placed on growing their social and cultural capital, potentially in service of postgraduate outcomes.

Finally, the post-survey included a question asking if interns received a job offer at their internship site at the conclusion of their internship. Ten interns reported receiving an offer to continue at their internship site, with 9 of those offers being part-time (the 10th student did not specify full or part-time), presumably because the majority of students are returning in the Fall 2024 semester for coursework at UNC Asheville (25 underclassmen and 3 seniors) and unable to work full-time yet. Half of the students who received offers to continue accepted the position to stay, with 5 of the 24 students who completed the post-survey continuing to work at their internship site after August 2024.

Student Intern Final Reflections

In early August 2024, students were asked to complete the final reflection either via written answers to the prompts in Appendix D or via an online recorded interview utilizing Big Interview software with answers to the same prompts. Thirteen students completed the final reflection. Out of the 13 students who completed it, six completed via recorded interviews and seven completed via written answer format. Big Interview was incorporated for two reasons: to minimize the amount of writing students were being asked to do and to provide a chance for students to practice speaking aloud about their internship. The final reflections were coded utilizing the same a priori codes used for the check-in interviews in Appendix E.

The first three codes relate to social capital: employers, jobs, and connections. Similar to the check-in interviews, connections had the most transcript excerpts assigned to it with 18. Students spoke about the depth of connections made with site supervisors and colleagues at their

sites. The students noted the time and attention given by professionals at their sites who demonstrated a strong interest in helping with their careers:

[Site supervisor] has had a huge impact on my future career. She has helped me to explore my passion for reading and writing by offering me experience in her field. She even took it a step further and helped me brainstorm what possible careers I might like to pursue in the future. She encouraged my potential and has given me great hope for the future of my career.

In addition to site supervisors, interns discussed coworkers, volunteers, and community members they came in contact with during their internships who had an impact on their next career steps. Interns also shared that the process of meeting people and creating new relationships with professionals in their field inspired them to continue to reach out to build their career networks.

Table 6 shows that the number of employers mentioned was lower (7) than the number of jobs (14), and students spoke to the two codes with ideas rather than concrete plans.

Table 6*Final Reflection A Priori Codes for Student Interns*

A priori code	n of participants contributing (N=13)	n of transcript excerpts assigned	Sample Quote
Employers	6	7	<i>“After this internship, I’ve realized that environmental monitoring is really the field for me. I loved working within a small team, and for a nonprofit organization, you can really see the difference that your work makes.”</i>
Jobs	10	14	<i>“I’ve just learned a lot of really great lab procedures that have really prepared me to work in a water testing lab or any lab in general.”</i>
Connections	10	18	<i>“I was able to meet, actually, like 14 different people through this [site name] partnership. And so I’ve really built up those connections.”</i>
Personal Development	8	8	<i>“I also learned a lot of skills within the company, like marketing, business, graphic design, so I would love to further those skills as well.”</i>
Cultural Fit	10	17	<i>“The skills I’ve gained during my internship have definitely been like those one-on-one conversation skills, so I think the biggest skill is definitely learning to talk to managers and learn about management and how to have those conversations. And it was way easier than I expected.”</i>
Confidence	12	17	<i>“I have really opened up a lot more and built more confidence in myself.”</i>

One student mentioned wanting to continue to volunteer and pursue jobs “in the arts and culture field.” Two students talked about future educational plans related to their industry of interest including a desire to “go back to school in public affairs or public policy” and another intends “on volunteering, which essentially I’ll be able to get a certification in helping people who do not have health care pick a plan and health care that’s right for them, that they qualify

for, and whatnot.” The student working in a STEM setting talked about being prepared for laboratory jobs, “I’ve just learned a lot of really great lab procedures that have really prepared me to work in a water testing lab or any lab in general.” The same student was offered a continuing internship at their site into Fall 2024 after the end of the UNC Asheville Internship Program internship and plans “to be looking for a full-time job or internship post-graduation to start in the spring.” Through the final reflections, students demonstrated growth in social capital, in knowing where to look for connections in the future, as well as who to talk to about their immediate next steps.

The second three codes relate to cultural capital: personal development, cultural fit, and confidence. Personal development had the fewest assigned excerpts (8). In personal development, students shared plans for future growth based on their experiences in the internship both in terms of hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills included plans to gain skills in Excel and earn a GIS certificate, while soft skills included plans to focus on organizational skills, time management, and networking. Transcript excerpts assigned to personal development were shorter and less reflective than in the other codes for cultural capital.

For the cultural fit and confidence codes, interns talked about fitting in at their sites, growing communication skills, and gaining confidence in their new field and industry as well as in themselves and their ability to navigate what comes next for them professionally. Learning how they fit in at their sites helped interns gain confidence in new settings. One student illustrated the way confidence and cultural fit are entwined:

I’ve gained a lot more confidence in myself and my abilities to navigate a more professional setting, as opposed to working in more of a retail setting. Everyone I had a chance with to interact over the course of my internship definitely influenced and

impacted how I feel about working in a professional setting and just having that confidence to be open in communication and willing to have that kind of dialog. I think that I've learned that's the most important part of any job or career setting in general, no matter where you work. So really, everyone in general that I had the chance to interact with impacted me.

This quote demonstrates that the growth of social and cultural capital can be circular, with social capital growth increasing cultural capital growth and vice versa. All of the students who completed the final reflection assignment discussed growth in the areas of social and cultural capital due to their internship experience. Together, the process, driver, balance, and outcome measures point to a successful first PDSA cycle implementation of the UNC Asheville Internship Program. The outcome measures of pre- and post-surveys and final reflections demonstrate growth in students' social and cultural capital both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Implications and Recommendations

The results point to an internship program at UNC Asheville that grows students' social and cultural capital through the sharing of institutional resources and connections. In addition to the success of the program, the data analysis process uncovered implications within each measure to be used in the next PDSA cycle of the UNC Asheville Internship Program and for practitioners outside of UNC Asheville to consider as they work on internship programs. This section will review the implications of the findings in the process, driver, and balancing measures as well as additional implications found through the data analysis. After reviewing the implications, the researcher will make recommendations for future PDSA cycles at UNC Asheville and for practitioners who want to improve social mobility for students from lower SES backgrounds using graduate employability capitals and internships.

Implications of Process Measures

The implications of the process measures encourage future PDSA cycles of the UNC Asheville internship program to pay special attention to timing of evaluations and use of the weekly supervision topics.

The timing of the evaluations in the program needs to be spaced for optimal data collection and to eliminate participant fatigue. Interview check-ins and the midterm evaluation can be scheduled with enough time between the two to capture new information and for students to not feel as though they are answering the same questions twice. It is possible that only one of these measures are necessary, depending on the timing and length of an internship program, as was seen in the first PDSA cycle of the UNC Asheville Internship Program.

It is also important to consider the participation in the use of the weekly topics, as they are intended to make social and cultural capital building an explicit part of the internship. The use of the weekly topics with interns and supervisors showed that at the time of check-in interviews, 45% of site supervisors were not yet using the weekly topics. Most site supervisors expressed a desire to start using the weekly topics when asked during the check-in interview but shared having forgot or not having had time yet. It is unlikely that site supervisors would share a lack of buy-in because of the desire to maintain a good relationship with the Internship Program Manager and researcher. It is also possible that weekly emails are not the best method for every site supervisor to be prompted with the topics. Conversations with site supervisors outside of the check-in interviews may provide an opportunity to discuss the best way to embed the supervision topics into their internships, as the best method will likely vary from site to site and supervisor to supervisor because of the unique differences in people and organizations.

It is beneficial to continue sharing the weekly topics with students, as several students reported prompting the conversation on topics with their site supervisors. However, the responsibility of initiating the topics cannot rest solely with student interns as the relationship with their internship site supervisor is unequal, with the supervisor holding more authority than the intern. It may be difficult for interns with less confidence and less experience on the job to initiate conversations with supervisors about the weekly topics or even other topics, an important dynamic for practitioners to consider in all internship programs.

Implications of Driver Measures

The check-in interviews demonstrated that during the internship, students were building social and cultural capital as intended. Only a few check-in interviews saw interns or site supervisors discuss all six codes, but across all 40 check-in interviews with students and site supervisors, each code was discussed at least minimally. The codes with the least number of assigned transcripts across all evaluations were jobs and employers, which fall under social capital. Students grew in the connections part of social capital, but did not make the same gains in knowledge of jobs and employers. It makes sense that in the first third of the internship hours, when check-in interviews took place, the site supervisor and students would not yet have focused on what employment the intern may seek following the completion of their internship. However, if this learning was taking place in the second two-thirds of the internship, the assigned transcript codes would have been higher in the final reflection interviews. The implication of this finding is that more can be done in the UNC Asheville Internship Program to share information about jobs and employers with students. The Internship Program Manager, researcher, and practitioners running internship programs can consider options to embed information on jobs and employers into internship programs both within supervision topics, and by additional methods.

Implications of Balancing Measures

The primary critical feedback of the two focus groups centered around communication: confusing the new internship program with other internship programs and the need to share the requirements and recommendations for how the program is run at internship sites.

The concerns of the business faculty member and the benefits shared in the faculty and staff focus group are likely applicable to more faculty and staff than were able to join that focus group. Therefore, the areas of concern require attention before the next PDSA cycle of the UNC Asheville Internship Program, which means placing a greater emphasis on messaging about what this specific internship program entails, how it complements other programs on campus, and clarifying the requirements for each site supervisor and intern. The benefits shared by faculty and staff with the researcher in the focus group can be used for marketing and shared with faculty and staff to increase knowledge of the program since the focus group drove the point home that not all faculty and staff working with students on internships were aware this program exists.

The feedback from the site supervisor focus group was also primarily positive about the program structure, the individual students, and internships as a benefit to site supervisors and interns in general. The employers in the focus group only represented nonprofit site supervisors who also received funding for their intern from UNC Asheville, which may have influenced the positive feedback. Based on the site supervisor focus group, we still do not know if site supervisors who paid their own interns as part of the program felt the same level of buy-in to the UNC Asheville Internship Program as those who received funding. The site supervisors did still express a few challenges, also centered around communication, including being uncertain about the hourly requirements for interns and the varied requirements of the different internship programs available to them at UNC Asheville. Supervisors at internship sites may work with

more than one college to host student interns, and therefore strong communication and keeping the internship information simple and timely will be helpful for site supervisors. As different internship programs even within the same college may have different requirements, it is important for practitioners to consider how to simplify the sharing of information and support site supervisors.

Additional Implications

Though not a primary intended result of the program, the feedback from site supervisors was also beneficial and suggests the internship program can maintain strong employer partnerships long-term. Insights on these benefits come from comparing the site supervisor check-in interview findings with the site supervisor focus groups and include 1) more than one site supervisor shared a desire to use the weekly topic questions with employees in addition to interns, 2) site supervisors appreciated the internship structure and resources provided by UNC Asheville, including the matching process and supervision resources provided, 3) site supervisors in the internship program believe in the benefits of having interns on site in general and their interns specifically (energy, enthusiasm, a new perspective), and 4) several site supervisors discussed critical projects the intern was able to tackle that the site would never have had time to do without their help and would not have thought of including without the Internship Program Manager's prompting to determine the intern's tasks ahead of time. The structure of the internship program is beneficial to site supervisors generally and in encouraging site supervisors to address social and cultural capital specifically during the internship.

The UNC Asheville Internship Program also demonstrates a benefit for first-generation college students and students with lower SES. Due to the state funding source, the UNC Asheville Internship Program could not be limited only to first-generation and lower-SES

students, but of the students participating, 37% can be identified as first-generation four-year college students and 54% come from families with incomes lower than the median household income in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2023). The gains in social and cultural capital applied to all the students in the UNC Asheville Internship Program, showing its promise as a tool for colleges to grow students' social and cultural capital to eventually increase postgraduate outcomes for students with lower SES.

Recommendations for Future PDSA Cycles at UNC Asheville

From the results of focus groups, the first recommended changes for PDSA Cycle 2 are in communication. The UNC Asheville Internship Program needs to invest in clear communication with internal and external partners and place increased emphasis on the communication that is working well in the program. The second recommended change for PDSA Cycle 2 is creating a timeline for a full fifteen-week semester for the next PDSA Cycle in spring 2025. The third recommended change is for PDSA Cycle 2 to address student attrition from sign up to internship match. Finally, future PDSA cycles will need to address capacity for the UNC Asheville Internship Program to expand in size.

Communication

The relationship between site supervisors and interns was one of the most important ways that students shared that they had access to grow social and cultural capital during their internships and one of the ways that communication worked well throughout the internship program. Future PDSA cycles can continue to invest in the site supervisor and intern relationship by creating more opportunities for communication between interns and site supervisors including a larger in-person kick-off meeting at the start of the program, continuing check-in interviews, and developing methods based on conversations with site supervisors to ensure all students and

site supervisors are aware of and using the weekly topics. Adding more information to employer recruitment about the critical nature of supervision for interns can guide employer organizations to select site supervisors most likely to engage interns to build social and cultural capital during the internship. Investing in strong relationships with internship site supervisors shows promise as a critical component in increasing growth in students' social and cultural capital.

The faculty and staff focus group offered insight into changes that can easily be made for stronger communication with faculty and staff at UNC Asheville. Options to consider for PDSA Cycle 2 include bringing together faculty who work on experiential learning programs regularly for in-person or Zoom meetings to discuss the different programs happening across the campus and how they can work together, a regular newsletter or email communication to alert key faculty and staff to the UNC Asheville Internship Program, and partnering with Academic Affairs to utilize current meetings with faculty and staff to share information about the UNC Asheville Internship Program.

Timeline

The first PDSA Cycle was run during a summer semester, which is a shorter timeline than a spring semester at UNC Asheville. Summer semesters last eight weeks while a spring semester lasts 15 weeks. The next cycle will take place in Spring 2025 and therefore students will work fewer hours per week, but more weeks over the semester. Adjustments need to be made to the timing of the weekly topics, and the researcher recommends they move to a bi-weekly time frame. The program may include a midterm evaluation as in a 15-week semester and the midterm can be appropriately spaced from the check-in interviews. The researcher recommends at least four weeks between the two to ensure ample time to capture students' growth.

Attrition

The internship program also needs to plan for attrition in student participation, as noted in the process measure section 53 students were accepted into the program, but the summer began with only 28 matches. Until there is a greater understanding of the reasons behind student attrition from sign-up to matching, the researcher recommends increasing the number of students accepted into the program to increase the number of students and internship site matches at the start of the internship program, assuming attrition will stay around the same rate (47%).

Capacity

The UNC Asheville Internship Program is fully sustainable at its current size and larger through the Career Center and the work of the Internship Program Manager. The funding for the program is through state funds received by UNC Asheville that are allocated by the senior administration of UNC Asheville to the Career Center to fund internships. The program has strong evaluation measures in place to ensure the continuation and future iterations of the UNC Asheville Internship Program. The evaluation results will continue to be shared with the senior administration to maintain current funding levels and request increases in funding to scale the program in the future.

For the UNC Asheville Internship Program to expand in size and provide growth in social and cultural capital for more students on campus, infrastructure will need to be addressed. One full-time dedicated Career Center staff member, the Internship Program Manager, can support upwards of 60 students per semester, every spring and every summer with a break in the fall semester to build more employer partnerships. Once the participant size is doubled to 60 from summer 2024's 28, the check-in interviews will be challenging to complete individually. The high touch aspects of the program provide for great support for students, which is needed (Hora

at al., 2021), especially as student support was a primary reason students opted to participate in the program, even more important than guaranteed pay. Further collaborations with faculty offer promising methods for increasing participation and scaling the program. Once at a capacity manageable by the Internship Program Manager, faculty collaborations can potentially help to ease the burden or allow an avenue through Academic Affairs to propose additional staffing to run the internship program. While staffing now is adequate to continue to run the program and potentially double its size, to increase the program to more than 60 students per semester, additional staffing will be needed.

These recommendations provide immediate and longer-term changes for the UNC Asheville Internship Program to make in PDSA Cycle 2 and beyond. Continued data collection and meetings of the design team will allow for future PDSA cycles to continue to improve the program.

Recommendations for Practitioners

The literature review on hiring and the importance of the graduate employability capitals for postgraduate career outcomes combined with the implications from the first PDSA Cycle of the UNC Asheville Internship program provides fertile ground for recommendations for higher education practitioners. For practitioners who wish to increase social mobility for students from lower SES backgrounds and fulfill the social mobility promise of higher education (Chan, 2016), the researcher offers the following three recommendations: 1) Develop foundational knowledge of the difference between the graduate employability capitals (Tomlinson, 2017; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021; Tomlinson et al, 2022), and how to build each one. The UNC Asheville Internship Program focuses on social and cultural capital, but it behooves a practitioner to become familiar with all five graduate employability capitals to create programming to increase

social mobility. 2) Practitioners need to commit to a high-touch process that offers interns and site supervisors support before and throughout the internship for the benefit of all participants. 3) As with many successful things, strong communication is necessary, both with participants in the program, and with colleagues, faculty, and staff at the college. These three recommendations drove the success of the UNC Asheville Internship Program and can guide practitioners to create effective programs to grow students' graduate employability capitals in the service of stronger postgraduate outcomes, especially for students with lower SES.

Foundational Knowledge of Graduate Employability Capitals

Most internship programs are currently grounded in the belief that human capital is all that students need to be successful in the job market (Hora, 2017; Hora, 2020). As practitioners we must not only recognize social capital, as NACE has (NACE, 2023a), but acknowledge that students need more than just connections and skills to land jobs. The site supervisor who discussed “vibe fit” in interviews gave a perfect example that hiring is more than just skills and connections. As the literature on hiring demonstrates, students need to be able to speak the language of their chosen industry and demonstrate the behaviors desired by that industry (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Hora, 2017; Rivera, 2012a; Tomlinson, 2017).

Following on the essential belief that hiring is more than just a skills-to-jobs framework, practitioners then need to expand into the full definitions of all five graduate employability capitals defined by Tomlinson (2017). Social and cultural capital are covered at length in this disquisition study for the role they play in the hiring process and student access to opportunities on campus and beyond (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Hora 2020; Martin, 2009; Rivera 2012a; Stuber, 2009; Tomlinson, 2017). Not studied here are two additional graduate employability capitals: identity capital and psychological capital (Tomlinson, 2017; Tomlinson & Anderson,

2021). These two capitals offer higher education practitioners across colleges, not just those in career education, an opportunity to focus on aspects of personal growth can help students define their identity and develop skills for resilience in their careers to promote strong postgraduate outcomes.

Identity Capital. Identity capital asks that practitioners help students develop a grounded sense of who they are in relation to the work they want to do (Tomlinson, 2017). Identity capital compliments cultural capital as the reflections and check-in interviews shows growth in confidence, which is a central aspect of both identity capital and cultural capital (Tomlinson, 2017; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). Practitioners throughout higher education help students develop identity capital as they offer experiential learning outside of internships for students to uncover their strengths, interests, and how they want to contribute to society (Tomlinson, 2017; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). Career practitioners then work with students to define the career-related meaning of their experiences during college in campus organizations, volunteer work, paid work, study abroad, and more. This meaning-making can happen in career center appointments, but 78% of students nationally reported rarely or never visiting their college career center (Gallup, 2018). For practitioners, finding methods to incorporate the development of identity capital more broadly into learning across campus can increase students' readiness for internships and potentially improve postgraduate career outcomes, even if students chose not to schedule a career center appointment.

Psychological Capital. Labor markets and jobs will change, with some disappearing entirely based on the economy (Holmes, 2013; Tomlinson, 2017). Students' careers are subject to change throughout life based on factors outside of their immediate control (Holmes, 2013) and psychological capital helps students develop resilience in the face of these external changes

(Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). Part of resilience is being able to rely on others and source other opportunities, which aligns well with social capital. Students with strong psychological capital are more likely to be able to leverage the other graduate employability capitals throughout their careers (Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). Practitioners can utilize this knowledge of the way that psychological capital is intertwined with the ability to summon the use of other graduate employability capitals when building learning opportunities that address resilience.

Committing to the recognition of the four additional graduate employability capitals that are currently overlooked in favor of human capital, provides practitioners with many more options to improve students' postgraduate outcomes than the singular focus of developing job skills (human capital). The graduate employability capitals provide a framework for practitioners to create programs, not just internship programs, that increase social mobility for students from lower SES backgrounds.

Commit to High Touch

The UNC Asheville Internship Program addressed a desire from students for more support in internships (Hora et al., 2021). While pay is a serious issue preventing students from participating in internships (Hora et al., 2021; NACE, n.d.), students have reported a desire for greater support in sourcing and completing internships as evidenced through the pre-survey for the UNC Asheville Internship Program. Site supervisors also shared in the desire for and appreciation of support from colleges during internships in both the check-in interviews and in the focus group. For the researcher, the human aspects of the UNC Asheville Internship Program are its greatest asset, even as scaling will necessarily require the use of technology to automate some parts of the program. Remaining committed to a high-touch, human-centered program is essential in growing graduate employability capitals through an internship program structured

like the UNC Asheville Internship Program. The UNC Asheville Internship Program demonstrated two critical points in the internship process where high touch yields strong outcomes: the preparation process prior to the internship and check-in interviews during the internships.

Preparation Process. Prior to the internships, the program provided support during the matching process, including preparing students to create application materials and interview, which site supervisors spoke of highly. Supervisors shared that students in the program were more prepared than students from other internship programs, meaning that the preparation may have contributed to growth in students' cultural capital even prior to the internship. More research is needed to determine the aspects of the preparation that were most impactful in helping students feel prepared to interview for internships and demonstrate 'fit' with internship sites, however there are still lessons for practitioners from this process.

The high-touch preparation process included every student having a point person to ask questions as they prepared, a four-hour hands-on workshop to create application materials, and an overview of what an application and interview process entails. When considering how to scale, ensuring students feel supported through the preparation process is a key component to remain high touch. While practitioners may incorporate technological elements in the preparation, such as AI interview practice and assigning videos that teach 'professional' behavior, it is critical that technological components compliment rather than eliminate a human mentoring resource for students during their preparation.

Check-in Interviews. Check-in interviews served as both a data collection point and an important high touch component of the internship program. During the internships, site supervisors discussed appreciating the check-in interviews as an opportunity to share about the

internship and ask questions they may not have thought to ask about without that touchpoint. Students also appreciated the check-ins and asked questions about how to handle situations on site that they may not have reached out to ask otherwise. The check-in interviews gave dedicated time for students and supervisors to address challenges during the internships that could have hindered the growth of social and cultural capital. The check-in interview conversations also provided an opportunity for practitioners to ensure that the internships were focused on building more than just human capital.

It may be tempting for practitioners to forego this touchpoint and assume students and site supervisors will reach out with any questions, especially as an internship program grows in the number of participants. However, as the researcher learned, students and site supervisors hold on to small questions or concerns and only express them when presented with the time and opportunity to do so. The check-in interviews also gave an opportunity for the Internship Program Manager and researcher to deepen relationships with students and site supervisors, ensuring that both viewed the college and career center as a resource in the future. These relationships provided an on-going opportunity to continue the growth of the current interns' graduate employability capitals, and to develop strong employer partnerships to host future internships.

Despite the time involved in meeting with each program participant, most conversations were less than twenty minutes and practitioners may be able to share the check-in load with colleagues across the college as internship programs increase in size. It is also possible to consider a format other than many one-to-one conversations that still allows for relationship building and space for questions; practitioners may explore meeting with students and supervisors on the same call or meeting with several students at once and several site supervisors

at once. The check-in interviews are an important high touch practice and while they may evolve to include different formats, the researcher recommends practitioners remain committed to the check-ins as they yield promising results.

Strong Communication

Strong communication is a part of high touch practices, but successful communication for an internship program expands beyond students and internship site supervisors. Communication plays a key role in the outreach to organizations to set up internships and building partnerships across the college campus in support of an internship program that builds students' social and cultural capital.

Outreach to Organizations. Businesses and organizations may receive outreach from more than one internship program and potentially more than one internship program from the same college as well as from different colleges. Good communication with organizations in the employer recruitment phase of the internship program helps them to identify the right person to serve in the role of site supervisor for an internship program focused on building social and cultural capital. From the results of the UNC Asheville Internship Program, site supervisors are essential resources for interns and ensuring an organization places students with strong site supervisors may increase students' growth in social and cultural capital.

Once site supervisors are identified, practitioner communication helps the site supervisor understand how their internship program is different than the other internship programs the supervisor may work with by clarifying the expectations of the program. Direct phone calls or in person conversations are likely the most impactful, but a Zoom orientation could also be used to describe the components of the program while providing time for the site supervisors to get to

know the practitioners and giving ample time for questions and clarification. From there, regular reminders in the method that site supervisors most prefer will likely prove effective.

Building Partnerships. For practitioners, it is critical to develop strong communication across the college campus, as evidenced by confusion from faculty on the UNC Asheville Internship Program. Once explained during the focus interviews, faculty shared ways they could incorporate the program into their current practices with students. Faculty needed more than the emails they had received about the program, they needed direct communication which was provided in the focus group. Instead of waiting until after the program, practitioners can leverage current relationships with faculty to discuss the development of internship programs and involve faculty from the start as partners and champions. Building relationships with faculty and staff throughout the college can bolster student participation, begin to address the reasons for attrition, and potentially lead to the creation of additional and/or supplemental programming to increase students' graduate employability capitals.

Through these three recommendations for practitioners, higher education professionals across the nation can consider what type of internship program design will have the greatest impact on students' graduate employability capitals on their own campus. UNC Asheville remains committed to future PDSA cycles and improving the current internship program design. With these recommendations it is possible other designs for internship programs will also prove effective in growing students' graduate employability capitals and making good on the promise of social mobility for college students.

Implications for Policy

The success of the UNC Asheville Internship Program's first PDSA Cycle suggests that paying interns creates access in more than one way. Site supervisors who could not afford to pay

their student interns said they were more inclined to participate in a college internship program when the students had access to internship funding, as they shared in the focus groups. The funding available created more opportunities at internship sites for students.

Based on the pre-survey, for 62% of the students in the program, guaranteed pay was one of the primary reasons they chose to participate in the UNC Asheville Internship Program. Students were more likely to participate in a program with guaranteed pay. National calls for required internship pay (NACE, n.d.) may limit the number of internships available at nonprofit and government organizations, and therefore policy recommendations surrounding pay requirements need to include flexibility for the source of funding to include not just employers, but also grants, stipends, and gifts from college donors. The UNC Asheville Internship Program suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to pay may not serve all sites and students.

Limitations of the Study

The findings from the first implementation of the UNC Asheville Internship Program has two primary limitations to be considered: sample size and type of university. The program aimed to have as many as 50 interns, but only 28 interns made it through the preparation and interviews with sites to be matched with an internship. From there, 19 interns completed both the pre- and post-survey, while 24 individual students completed the pre-survey and 24 individual students completed the post-survey. The size of this sample studied in the UNC Asheville Internship Program is small and therefore the results need future iterations to determine if the effects seen in the outcomes of the disquisition study are replicable.

UNC Asheville is a small, public, liberal arts university with students majoring in traditional liberal arts majors, and typically not in job-focused degrees. An internship program structured like the UNC Asheville Internship Program may have different outcomes at larger

universities and within career-focused majors (like hospitality, nursing, education, etc.). Student engagement and investment may be different for students who are attending college to pursue specific work outcomes, and therefore their internship outcomes may differ based on the context of the college or university implementing a similar internship program.

Despite the limitations, the results shared from the first PDSA Cycle of the UNC Asheville Internship Program hold promise that the structure of the program makes a difference in interns' social and cultural capital, including first-generation and lower SES students. Utilizing the structure of the program and providing support for students to explicitly grow social and cultural capital in addition to human capital provides groundwork that colleges and universities can use across majors to eventually improve postgraduate outcomes for students, and interrupt social reproduction.

Directions for Future Research

The UNC Asheville Internship Program offers several fascinating areas for future research including defining and growing cultural capital, comparison research with other internship programs, and research on the potential impacts of internships on SES and postgraduate outcomes.

The UNC Asheville Internship Program increased social and cultural capital for students, especially in the growth of students' career networks and how to 'fit in' in new professional environments. However, there was a challenge for site supervisors to talk about the specific behaviors needed for their sites in terms other than 'professionalism.' Behaviors, as evidenced by the transcript excerpts shared from site supervisors, are more nuanced and expected to be implicit rather than explicit. A site supervisor mentioned that their student walked in as though they fit at the organization and suggested that the resume, cover letter, and interview preparation

contributed significantly to that ease for the intern and the site. Currently, the preparation workshops are not being studied by this disquisition and should be studied more in the future. How much does internship preparation for students contribute to the cultural capital that is perceived when they walk into their internship? Future research on methods that improve and accurately measure cultural capital will be beneficial for internship programs.

The UNC Asheville Internship Program represented a small, public, liberal arts university. Future research on the impact of internship structures that focus on social and cultural capital in other contexts would provide solid evidence that the model used in this PDSA Cycle can be replicated and used at other types of colleges, especially those of larger size and with more career-related majors. The context of UNC Asheville is considered a limitation, and therefore that context provides insight ripe for future research.

Finally, the goal of the UNC Asheville Internship Program is to eventually increase postgraduate outcomes for lower SES students by sharing social and cultural capital through an internship program. This disquisition study cannot yet measure long-term postgraduate outcomes due to its time-limited nature. Research on components of internship programs that provide the most benefit for students with lower SES is needed to determine the structure that will have the greatest impact on postgraduate outcomes and social mobility.

Conclusion

Students attend college in the hopes of bettering their future and creating upward social and economic mobility (Chua, 2016). Colleges and universities have an obligation to provide students with the resources they need to secure the future they want for themselves, which is the promise of many higher education degree programs. Right now, that promise is going unfulfilled by colleges across the nation (Chetty et al., 2020). As more students of lower SES pursue college

degrees (Fry & Cilluffo, 2019), disparate postgraduate outcomes create inequity and perpetuate the divide between students who have more access and resources and those who do not. The reasons why college degree programs fail to improve social mobility across the board are not well-studied, but a root cause analysis shows that the priorities of higher education degree programs are not well-aligned with how students are evaluated and hired into jobs after college.

Hiring is an individual and interpersonal process that involves subjectivity (and bias) at the application stage and the interview stage (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Hora et al., 2020; Rivera 2012a). Students may meet the degree requirements for a position but be screened out of the process due to other factors including a lack of commonality with the hiring manager and not having an internship experience (NACE 2023b; Rivera, 2012a; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). To be successful in a job search after graduation, students need more than a college degree, they need to have connections, both social and cultural, with their potential employer (Chua & Mamanian, 2020; Hora et al., 2020; Rivera 2012a; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021). These connections can be provided through social and cultural capital, which higher SES students often start college with more of than lower SES students. Social capital includes the relationships and networks needed for students to source potential opportunities including internships and jobs after graduation, and cultural capital includes the knowledge of the behaviors and personal attributes needed to be successful in a particular career field (Tomlinson, 2017). For students with lower SES, colleges are their primary source for building social and cultural capital to seek similar postgraduate outcomes as their higher SES peers (Friend, 2021; Martin, 2009; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Stuber, 2009).

To make good on the promise of social mobility, colleges must consider not only how they improve retention and graduation rates for students but also how to share social and cultural

capital with students for postgraduate outcomes. Internship programs hold promise, but many fall short for students from lower SES backgrounds because they require considerable social, cultural, and financial capital to access (Hora et al., 2021). Employers cite internships as a key factor in the hiring process (NACE 2023b; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021), and alumni list internships as a key factor in their career success (The Career Leadership Collective, 2022). Students across the United States, especially lower SES students, want to pursue internships but are prevented by barriers to access including not knowing how to find an internship, not having a car, and not being able to afford to work an unpaid position, among others (Hora et al., 2021).

This disquisition study and improvement initiative sought to bridge the gap between students' desire to participate in internships and their ability to do so while structuring the internship program to build the social and cultural capital needed to improve students' postgraduate career outcomes. The UNC Asheville Internship Program was the first program of its kind at UNC Asheville and may be one of the only of its kind nationwide. Most internship programs require students to utilize current financial and social capital to access (Hora et al., 2021; Stuber, 2009) and are typically embedded in academic programs within a college, not accessible to all students across the university regardless of major. Typically, the content of internship programs focuses on building human capital in the alignment of learning objectives with major and/or academic program outcomes which can be seen in the first line of NACE (2023a) definition that internships “integrate knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skill development”. The UNC Asheville Internship Program takes advantage of Tomlinson's (2017) graduate capital theory and expands the emphasis of the internship program to include social and cultural capital in addition to human capital, which is

critical in the hiring process after graduation (Chua & Mamanian, 2021; Hora, 2020; Rivera 2012a; Tomlinson & Anderson, 2021).

The UNC Asheville Internship Program demonstrated that a structure for internships focused on access and support led to increases in social and cultural capital for students, almost half of whom who participated could be identified as lower SES. Future internship programs across the nation can build and expand on the four components of the program 1) financial support for students, 2) social and cultural capital resources provided by the college and the employer, 3) institutional support for students during the matching process, and 4) support and direction for students and site supervisors to build social and cultural capital during the internship. The UNC Asheville internship program ensured that every student in the program was paid either by the employer or by a UNC Asheville Internship Scholarship. Prior to the internship, site supervisors committed to introducing their student interns to professionals in their industry, and students were prepared to interview for their internships. During the internship, students and site supervisors were provided discussion topics to build social and cultural capital during regular supervision; the researcher and Internship Program Manager also supported the internships through check-in interviews giving each intern and site supervisor a resource at UNC Asheville.

The pre- and post-survey showed a statistically significant increase in students' social and cultural capital through the UNC Asheville Internship program. The qualitative measures of the program provided more nuanced information about what works well in internships for students and site supervisors. The structure of the program was named multiple times as a benefit for site supervisors, and the curriculum of weekly topics focused on intentionally building social and cultural capital showed promise as a tool that can be used for interns and potentially current

employees. The primary benefit of the program for students was the relationship with their site supervisors. Students shared that their site supervisors played a critical role in orienting them to the internship, introducing them to the other participants at the organization, helping them learn the cultural expectations of the site and industry, and building their career networks. All of these are components of social and cultural capital critical in the hiring process for postgraduate career outcomes. The sourcing, preparation, and communication with internship site supervisors is a critical factor for the success of college-run internship programs. Just as hiring managers are the gatekeepers to opportunity for postgraduate outcomes (Hora, 2020), internship site supervisors are the gatekeepers of a strong internship experience and need attention and support from colleges during the internship itself.

Students across the nation who want to participate in internships to improve their postgraduate outcomes need help throughout the process, too (Hora et al., 2021). The students who signed up for the UNC Asheville Internship Program cited the support from the Career Center as an even greater reason for participation than guaranteed pay. Anecdotally, one internship participant at a graduation event at UNC Asheville told the researcher in December 2024 that she had no idea how she would have found an internship without the support of the program, and she continued to work at her internship site. The matching component was beneficial for students and site supervisors and led to stronger internship outcomes for students.

With NACE's introduction of social capital into the definition of internships (NACE, 2023b) the field of career education is moving toward recognizing that more than just human capital is needed to provide students with postgraduate career success. However, as a field, career services still discuss appropriate behavior through the lens of undefined 'professionalism,' which neglects that the behaviors and language needed in different industries differ. Cultural

capital remains implicit and as such it is difficult to provide students with guidance on how to ‘fit’ in their chosen industry. Internships provide a long-term opportunity for students to build cultural capital, and the curriculum of weekly topics bolstered the recognition of cultural capital as a learning tool necessary for students to be successful in their chosen field. Students and supervisors were prompted to talk about behaviors that are usually considered innate or implicit, giving students the opportunity to adjust their behaviors to the expectations of their work environment.

The future of the UNC Asheville Internship Program is clear and established. The Internship Program Manager and researcher will continue to grow the program. Based on this disquisition we will incorporate greater communication with all stakeholders including faculty, staff, students, and employers. The challenge will be to ensure a high-touch program, as that is what led to many of the results seen in this disquisition while increasing the size of the program to benefit more students. Students and site supervisors benefited from the structure of the program, including preparation and regular outreach before and during the internships. Success for the program relies in maintaining and bolstering the relationships between students and site supervisors with the support of the Career Center at UNC Asheville.

The UNC Asheville Internship Program provided a college-led intervention for students to gain social, cultural, and financial capital without needing to expend their personal resources. While the program had a small sample size and took place at a small traditional liberal arts university, the UNC Asheville Internship Program created a structured model that can be used at colleges across the United States to improve the way that universities share their institutional resources with students in the service of improving postgraduate career outcomes for students

with lower SES. UNC Asheville will continue to use and improve on the model studied in this disquisition and I hope other colleges will join us.

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APPENDIX A

Topics for the UNC Asheville Internship Program

Topic: Introduction and orientation to the workplace (cultural capital)

During regular weekly supervision meeting with your intern go over expectations of the internship site including, but not limited to:

- Best ways to communicate with you and other members of the organization
- Timeliness expectation of communication
- Regular attire for on-site work

Topic: Introduction to key members of the organization (social capital)

During regular weekly supervision with your intern, go over the structure of your organization and introduce your intern to key members of the organization

- Mission statement
- Organizational chart
- Key decision-makers in the organization
 - Set up time for the intern to meet individually with members of the organization they don't regularly work with
- Competitors and/or collaborative organizations

Topic: Jargon and Industry expectations (cultural capital)

During regular weekly supervision with your intern, go over typical jargon used in the industry, as well as behavioral expectations that organizations have

- Words and acronyms the student should be familiar with in a job search
- Resume standards – what do employers look to see on a resume
 - What pointers do you have for the intern's resume?
- Typical entry-level job titles for the industry
- Interview standards – what do employers look for an interview?

Topic: Introduction to at least one person outside of your organization (social capital)

During regular weekly supervision with your intern, introduce them to a person who works in your industry, but does not work at your organization

- Student will reach out and complete an informational interview (with the support of the UNC Asheville Career Center for conversation topics/questions)
- Offer insight into topics the student should address with the networking contact

Topic: Online presence: LinkedIn, and how to find information on your industry (social capital)

During regular weekly supervision with your intern, go over how to access more about this field/industry online

- Professional Associations
- Conferences or networking events
- LinkedIn: how is it used within this field
 - What pointers do you have for your intern's LinkedIn page?
- Online job search: where is it best to look

Topic: Skills: What skills does the intern still need to build?

During regular weekly supervision with your intern, talk the skills they have gained during the internship and recommendations to build future skills.

- What job skills has the intern built during their internship?
- What skills do they still need to gain to be competitive in this industry?
- How can the intern continue to build those skills after the internship ends?

Topic: Next Steps: where does the intern want to go from here?

During regular weekly supervision with your intern, talk about what is next for them when the internship ends.

- If they want to go into your field, when should they begin their job search?
- What is the best process to add more contacts to their personal network?
- What should they include from their internship on their resume?
- What type of interview questions should they be prepared to answer?

APPENDIX B

UNC Asheville Internship Program Timeline

Task title	Task Owner	Due Date	PDSA	Measure
Design Team Convenes	Design Team	February-24	Plan	
Advertise for Internship Program: Students & Employers	Grace Champion	February-24	Do	
Execute Student Workshops	Lisa Mann & Grace Champion	February-24	Do	
Finalize Students & Employers	Grace Champion	March-24	Do	
Begin weekly memo writing	Lisa Mann & Grace Champion	March 2024 - September 2024	Do	Process Measure
Facilitate Internship Matching Process	Grace Champion	March 2024 - April 2024	Do	
Design Team Convenes	Design Team	March-24	Plan	
Finalize Student and Employer Matches; sign Internship Agreements	Grace Champion	April-24	Do	
Recruitment of students for DQ Study of the Internship Program	Lisa Mann	April-24	Do	
Internships Begin	Lisa Mann & Grace Champion	May 2024 - June 2024	Do	
Pre-Survey	Lisa Mann	May-24	Do	Outcome Measure
Weekly Supervision Topics Sent	Lisa Mann	May 2024 - August 2024	Do	
First Check-in with Students and Site Supervisors	Lisa Mann & Grace Champion	June-24	Do	Driver + Process Measures
Midterm Evaluations for students	Lisa Mann	June 2024 - July 2024	Do	Driver Measure
Second Check-in with Students and Site Supervisors	Lisa Mann & Grace Champion	July-24	Do	Driver + Process Measures
Final Reflection Assignment for Students	Lisa Mann	August-24	Do	Outcome Measure
Focus groups with UNC Asheville faculty/staff, students and employers	Lisa Mann	August-24	Do	Balance Measure
Post- Survey Emailed to Interns	Lisa Mann	August-24	Do	Outcome Measure
Design Team Convenes; Review cycle 1	Design Team	August-24	Study	
Make Changes for Second Cycle: Spring 2025	Design Team	August-24	Act	
Review Changes and Create Timeline for Second Cycle	Lisa Mann & Grace Champion	September-24	Plan	

APPENDIX C

UNC Asheville Internship Program Pre-Survey

Questions adapted from the graduate capital scale (Tomlinson et al., 2022)

Name
Major
Year in School
Student ID

What is the highest level of education completed by your parents/guardians?

- Did not complete high school
- Completed a high school diploma or GED
- Completed a two-year Associate degree
- Completed a four-year Bachelor degree
- Completed a professional degree or higher (Masters, JD, MD, PhD, etc.)

What is the average total income of the household in which you grew up?

- \$50,000 or less
- \$50,000 to \$75,000
- \$75,000 to \$100,000
- \$100,000 to \$150,000
- \$150,000 or above

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social Capital						
I keep up to date with the job market for recent college graduates						
I can name key employers of interest to me						
I evaluate the changing job market in my career thinking						
I can list some job roles which I would be suited to after graduation						
I am confident I can make the most of opportunities for personal development						

I use my network of career contacts to inform my career planning						
I have developed contacts with employers						
Cultural Capital						
I know how to find out about skills, attributes and behaviors required for different types of employment						
I am able to judge whether organizations will suit me						
I know what type of role I am interested in						
I feel confident I can present myself well in the job sector which interests me						
I can identify what employers value most in college graduates						
I can give examples of achievements which would interest employers						
I have distinctive achievements and interests which make me stand out from others						

What are the reasons you decided to pursue the UNC Asheville Internship Program?

Select all that apply.

Guaranteed pay

Matching process makes it easier to get connected with employers

Support from the Career Center throughout the internship

Help seeking academic credit for the experience

None

Other – please explain

What do you hope to get out of the UNC Asheville Internship Program?

Select all that apply.

Increase my skills needed on the job in my chosen career field

Increase the number of people in my network

Increase understanding of the day to day work in my chosen career field
Increase understanding of the hiring process for my chosen career field
Increase understanding of what makes a resume stand out in my chosen career field
Increase understanding of how to do well in an interview in my chosen career field
None
Other – please explain

UNC Asheville Internship Program Post-Survey

Questions adapted from the graduate capital scale (Tomlinson et al., 2022)

Name

Major

Year

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social Capital						
I keep up to date with the job market for recent college graduates						
I can name key employers of interest to me						
I evaluate the changing job market in my career thinking						
I can list some job roles which I would be suited to after graduation						
I am confident I can make the most of opportunities for personal development						
I use my network of career contacts to inform my career planning						
I have developed contacts with employers						
Cultural Capital						
I know how to find out about skills, attributes and behaviors required for different types of employment						
I am able to judge whether organizations will suit me						
I know what type of role I am interested in						
I feel confident I can present myself well in						

the job sector which interests me						
I can identify what employers value most in college graduates						
I can give examples of achievements which would interest employers						
I have distinctive achievements and interests which make me stand out from others						

What the primary outcomes of the UNC Asheville Internship program for you, personally?

Select all that apply.

Increased my skills needed on the job in my chosen career field

Increased the number of people in my professional network

Increased understanding of the day to day work in my chosen career field

Increased understanding of the hiring process for my chosen career field

Increased understanding of what makes a resume stand out in my chosen career field

Increased understanding of how to do well in an interview in my chosen career field

None

Other – please explain

Did you receive a job offer from your internship site?

Yes – Full-time

Yes – Part-time

No

No, but I made networking connections for my future job search

Not Applicable, I am planning to attend graduate school

Branching for yes responses:

Did you accept the role?

What is the pay rate?

APPENDIX D

UNC Asheville Internship Program Final Reflection Interview

Each question is a prompt to be recorded via interview:

- **Accomplishments:** What have you done during your internship that you are proud of? What failures have you learned from?
- **Skills assessment:** what skills have you gained in your internships, and what skills you still want to gain?
- **Professional development:** how have changed as a professional in your field over the course of your internship?
- **Connections:** Who have you met that has had an impact on your future career? Who do you still want to meet?
- **Next steps:** What do you plan to do now that your internship is over?
- **Anything else** you would like to share

APPENDIX E

Data Analysis: A Priori Codes

Determined using the graduate capital scale (Tomlinson et al., 2022)

Code	Definition	Cultural Capital or Social Capital
Employers	Names of organizations and potential places the intern may work after graduation	Social Capital
Jobs	Specific positions within employers and organizations where the intern may work after graduation	Social Capital
Connections	The people the intern considers to be a part of their career network, including new contacts made at their internship site	Social Capital
Personal Development	How the intern is intending to grow their skills and behaviors to meet the demands of their intended future career	Cultural Capital
Cultural Fit	How the intern describes the behaviors and personal attributes/work style needed for success in their industry	Cultural Capital
Confidence	How the intern describes their skills, ability, and potential to fit in their industry, may include discussion of achievements	Cultural Capital

APPENDIX F

UNC Asheville Internship Program Midterm evaluation

Student:

1. Since the beginning of your internship, what have you learned about the behavioral expectations of your organization? (Timeliness, communication style, attire, etc.)
2. You're halfway through your internship, what accomplishments do you feel confident in being able to share to a future employer? If you don't have any yet, what are some that you are working toward?
3. Since the start of your internship, what new companies and organizations have you learned about who typically hire entry level people in this field?
4. Since the start of your internship, how many new relationships have you built with professionals that you can reach out to for help in a job search?

APPENDIX G

UNC Asheville Internship Program Check-in Interview Questions

Site supervisor:

1. How many hours per week is your intern working?
0-5
5-10
10-15
15 or more
2. Do you meet with your intern every week for supervision?
Yes/No
3. Is your supervision meeting in person?
Yes/Sometimes/No
4. During your weekly supervision, do you utilize the topics recommended for that week by the UNC Asheville Career Center?
Yes/Sometimes/No
5. How many people have you introduced the intern to both at your organization and outside of it?
6. What behavioral expectations have you communicated to the intern thus far?
7. In what ways have you seen the intern demonstrate growth in the skills and behaviors needed to secure a job in this field?
8. What challenges have occurred during the internship so far?
9. What successes have you seen in the internship so far?
10. Is there anything that you want the UNC Asheville Career Center to know?

Student:

1. How many hours per week are you working at your internship site?
0-5
5-10
10-15
15 or more
2. Do you meet with your site supervisor every week for supervision?
Yes/No
3. Is your supervision meeting in person?
Yes/Sometimes/No
4. During your weekly supervision, does the site supervisor utilize the topics recommended for that week by the UNC Asheville Career Center?
Yes/Sometimes/No
5. How many people have you been introduced to both at your organization and outside of it?
6. What have you learned about the potential employers and the job market in this field?
7. What have you learned about yourself in relation to the skills and behavioral expectations of this industry? Do you feel you are a good fit?
8. What challenges have occurred during the internship so far?
9. What successes have you seen in the internship so far?
10. Is there anything that you want the UNC Asheville Career Center to know?

APPENDIX H

Focus Group Questions

UNC Asheville Faculty and Staff

1. How has the UNC Asheville Internship Program affected your work?
2. What is helpful about the UNC Asheville Internship Program?
3. What is difficult about the UNC Asheville Internship Program?
4. What changes do you want to see in the UNC Asheville Internship Program moving forward?
5. What effect have you seen the internship program have on students?
6. If applicable, what effect have you seen the internship program have on employers?
7. If applicable, what effect have you seen the internship program have on your coworkers?
8. If applicable, what effect have you seen the internship program have on other internship programs already on campus?
9. What effect, if any, have you seen the internship program have on the campus as a whole?

Employers in the UNC Asheville Internship Program

1. How has the UNC Asheville Internship Program affected your work?
2. What is helpful about the UNC Asheville Internship Program?
3. What is difficult about the UNC Asheville Internship Program?
4. What changes do you want to see in the UNC Asheville Internship Program moving forward?
5. What effect have you seen the internship program have on students?
6. If applicable, what effect have you seen the internship program have on your coworkers?
7. If applicable, what effect have you seen the internship program have on other internship programs?

Students in the UNC Asheville Internship Program

1. How has the UNC Asheville Internship Program affected you?
2. What was helpful about the UNC Asheville Internship Program?
3. What was difficult about the UNC Asheville Internship Program?
4. What changes do you want to see in the UNC Asheville Internship Program moving forward?
5. What effect have you seen the internship program have on students in the program?
6. What effect have you seen the internship program have on students not in the program?
7. What effect have you seen the internship program have on the campus as a whole?