

Student Self-Evaluation Paper
Leadership and Advocacy Internship
COUC 999

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Abstract

Leadership and advocacy serve as two core areas of counselor educator identity. These areas can be developed through internship opportunities for doctoral students in a variety of settings, including community behavioral health. As a third year doctoral student working in a community setting, my internship involved developing and ultimately expanding a partnership between the university and a community behavioral health organization on program evaluation of an adult drug treatment court in Lynchburg, Virginia. This collaboration built upon a previous program evaluation partnership on a rural health grant that my agency implemented in 2021. Some of the goals that I accomplished during my internship included working with community stakeholders on the evaluation plan and collaborating with two university professors on the evaluation design. My leadership skills expanded through engagement with community stakeholders on program evaluation. More broadly, this internship has implications for a larger and expanded partnership between the university and community behavioral health organization. Overall, the focus of my internship was to advance my leadership skills to serve our community. As a future counselor educator, my identity is steeped in public service. This internship allowed me to be a voice for our community members most in need by developing programs to evaluate community wellness.

Keywords: leadership, advocacy, collaboration, community, university

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Discuss some of the challenges/concerns you've faced throughout the semester, how you overcame them, and how they were instrumental in your growth and learning (i.e. in supervision, in group supervision, etc.).

One of the challenges I faced during the semester was a reconfiguration of my internship. Initially, I planned to work with a CES faculty member on a statewide association for career counselors. I was looking forward to the learning and growth opportunities that this activity would have for me. However, this placement did not materialize so I went in a different direction with my internship. I accrued internship hours through a university/community partnership in program evaluation. More specifically, I was working on a program evaluation with two faculty members who served as external evaluators for a federal grant to implement an evidence-based treatment model in our rural catchment area. We received funding to implement this program in 2021. We were completing a successful first year of implementation when I learned that my agency was awarded another multi-year grant to expand the capacity of our drug treatment court in Lynchburg. My summer internship consisted of leadership and advocacy activities to support this university/community program evaluation partnership.

My agency was awarded funding over the next four years to expand treatment and recovery supports for individuals involved in the criminal justice system with substance use disorders. Initially, the program evaluation collaboration was me and a professor with expertise in quantitative research methods. As we met to develop our program evaluation plan, we decided that a qualitative case study would allow an in-depth examination of the drug court program using a participatory evaluation approach. We both believed in working alongside the drug court team rather than a top-down evaluation approach. Together, we added a qualitative researcher to

our team and expanded our evaluation method to include both a quantitative and qualitative design. While I was disappointed that leadership in the career counselors association did not materialize, I learned the importance of being flexible and adaptable. Flexibility and adaptability were instrumental in my growth and in building resilience.

Discuss some of the successes you've had and what encouragement you hope to take from them (i.e. in supervision, in group supervision, etc.).

My leadership internship resulted in several successes on a community and personal/professional level. On a community level, my evaluation partners and I identified facilitators and barriers of an evidence-based treatment model that my agency implemented in 2021 through federal grant funding. In addition, we enrolled over 50 adults with serious mental illness into this program. More specifically, our project team (i.e., clinical team) helped these community members recognize signs and symptoms of their illness, understand the nature and course of their illness, develop a relapse prevention plan, comply with their medication regimen, and increase their social connectedness. Their approach focused on the individual goals of each client in formulating a treatment plan. On a personal/professional level, our community work resulted in a publication in a peer-reviewed journal on adoption of the evidence-based practice in Central Virginia. We have another manuscript on our qualitative case study that we will submit for publication in August. More importantly, university and community relationships were fostered and strengthened during this program evaluation project. I am encouraged that these partnerships will grow and sustain over time.

Discuss some areas you would identify as strengths. Are there new areas of strength that you perhaps did not identify as such earlier in the semester? (You may also include areas supervisors and peers have helped you identify).

A leadership strength that I possess is a relational rather than transactional approach in working with partners and community stakeholders. I value relationship development rather than seeing collaboration as a transaction. As a result, these relationships are professionally rich and meaningful. In addition, I identify and utilize strengths in my collaborators, partners, and stakeholders. I use this strength-based approach as we work together to address intractable community problems, such as substance use, poverty, homelessness, and mental health issues. Furthermore, as a leader, I aspire to be fair and non-judgmental. I try to recognize my own biases and set them aside. I take a measured approach in responding to issues or problems that may arise. I am not reactionary in my leadership style. I try to take a balanced look at the problem and seek feedback from all parties on a possible solution. A new area of strength for me following this internship is skill in writing and preparing interview guides for qualitative interviews. This skill will transition to my dissertation, a qualitative study on lived experiences of drug treatment court judges. One of the professors that I partner with in program evaluation has expertise in qualitative research, and he helped me develop this skill during my internship.

Discuss some areas you would identify for continued growth and improvement. (You may also include areas supervisors and peers have helped you identify).

One area for growth and improvement is ensuring that my management projects do not outsize my capacity to manage them. There are times when I over commit myself and this causes a work-life imbalance. This happened a couple of times during the semester when I had

competing deadlines. I found myself being short and less engaging with others when this happened. To address this area for continued growth, I need to take a realistic appraisal of my workload when I am asked to lead or join a project. I had one success in recognizing my limits over the summer. I was asked to join a board of directors for a non-profit in our community. I helped the board write a grant for an historic preservation project in the spring. I recognized that taking a role on the board would over extend me, so I respectfully declined. Another smaller but important area of growth is proofreading e-mails for grammatical and spelling errors. A third area of improvement is my scholarly writing. Feedback from my mentors suggests that I could improve by writing in a more captivating manner. My action plan is to monitor my work/life balance through check-ins with my agency supervisor and mentor monthly, proofread my e-mails before sending, and read an article on how to make scholarly writing more engaging.

Considering the 2-3 major goals/areas you targeted to develop and improve in throughout the semester and the ways you planned to work toward accomplishing them, discuss how this went for you. As your internship experience draws to an end and you look ahead to your role as a counselor educator, identify an area that you hope to focus on growing in.

My initial 2-3 goals for the semester changed from my initial proposal since the direction of my internship changed. However, goals for my university/community partnership on program evaluation were to expand relationships with community stakeholders in the program evaluation process, identify priority areas the stakeholders wanted our team to address, and develop a program evaluation plan consistent with stakeholder engagement and feedback. These goals were accomplished with guidance from the two university professors I partnered with, who served as external evaluators on this project. One of the professors met with community stakeholders after

court in May 2021 to present our program evaluation plan and to seek feedback from the drug court team (i.e., the judge, attorneys, treatment providers) in line with a participatory evaluation process. I was present during this meeting to provide input on the specifics of our grant and scheduling qualitative individual interviews with the drug court team. As a future counselor educator, a focus area is continued university/community collaboration. One way that I will focus on this goal is through a partnership between my agency and Liberty's psychology department. My agency is an approved practicum site for Liberty's Psy.D. doctoral students, and we have three students starting their practicum with us this month. I have a leadership role in my agency on developing and implementing this process. In this role, I have been meeting with professors in the psychology department, my agency's site supervisors, and the students to ensure a smooth onboarding process and a meaningful practicum experience for the students.

Reflect upon your supervision experience (i.e. site, faculty, and group). Be honest with yourself! What worked well for you and what was less helpful? What challenged you to grow? What supervision experiences, even those that were less than positive, really contributed to your growth and formation this semester? How and why? What will you seek out in future supervisory relationships as a result of these experiences?

In reflecting upon my supervision experience, I was appreciative of the flexibility in the group supervision. Balancing work and family with school can be a challenge for me and my peers. The flexibility in the group meetings was helpful in balancing my work and life priorities. There were times when I joined supervision meetings from my car due to transportation of my children and/or my work schedule. I was thankful for this flexibility. The experiences working with Dr. Milacci contributed to my growth this semester as he modeled leadership with grace and

utmost class as he interacted with community stakeholders on our program evaluation project. He combines professionalism, curiosity, engagement, and respect with each stakeholder he interviewed. Additionally, he consistently engaged with me on this project in a supportive and encouraging manner. He wove in teaching me about qualitative research design as we conducted the drug treatment court program evaluation. In the future, I will seek out supervisory experiences similar to what I encountered this summer. I enjoy working with supervisors and mentors who are positive, responsive, and offer both positive and constructive feedback.

In conclusion, my summer leadership and advocacy internship was overwhelmingly a positive experience in my professional growth and my overall goal of service to our community. While I had to be flexible and change my internship when my initial plan did not come to fruition, I found many benefits to focusing on a university/community program evaluation partnership. Some of these benefits included growth in engaging community stakeholders as a program evaluator and development of interview guides in program evaluation. Lastly, leading the development of our program evaluation manuscripts advanced by scholarly writing skills. I am thankful for the roles of the professors, community stakeholders, and my colleague in the class.