

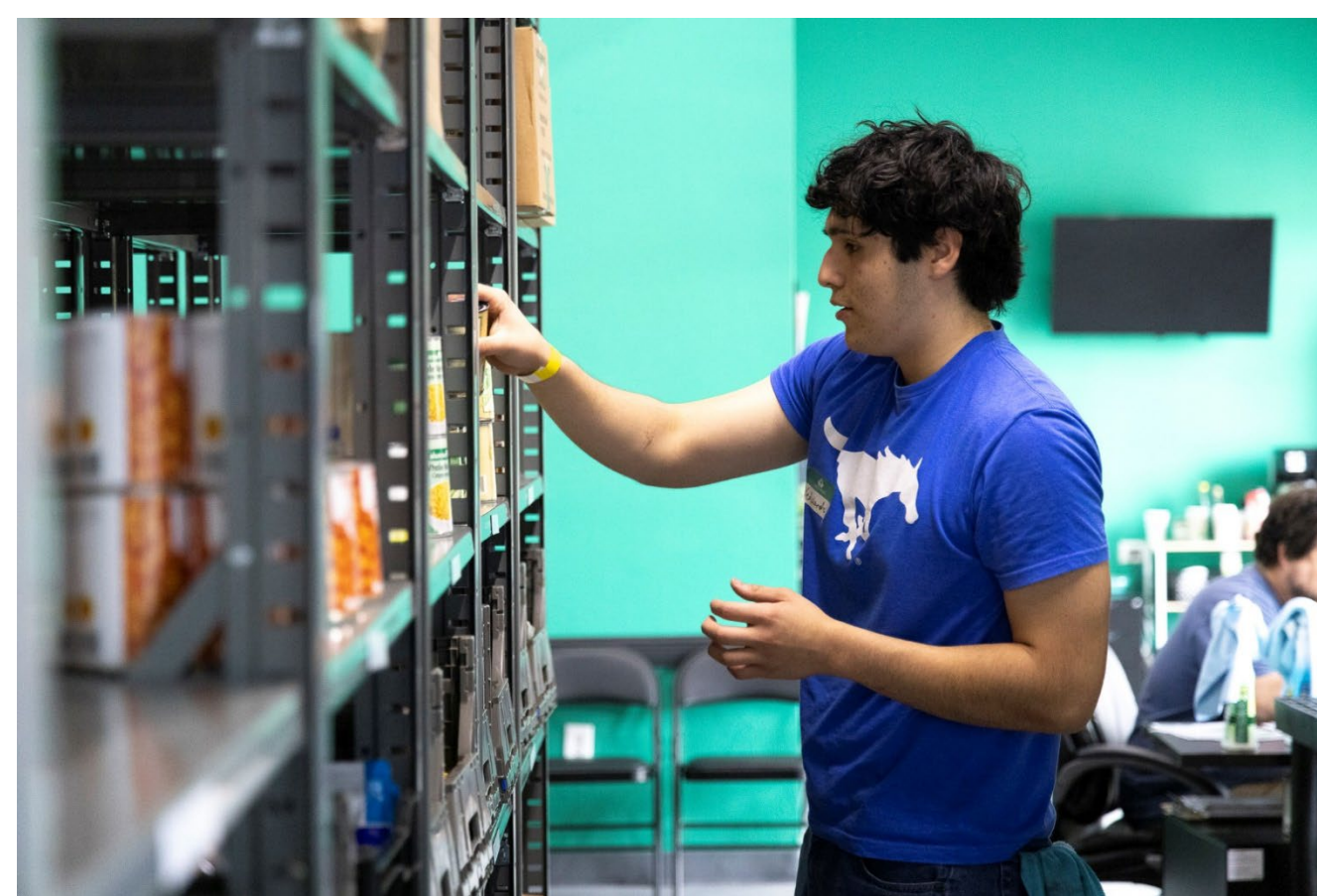
INTRODUCTION

"What should matter most is what students know, and what they are able to do with their degree...I am agnostic about where you went to school. I want to know whether or not you have those outcomes that are going to prepare you for work and life," remarked Jamie P. Merisotis, the President and CEO of the Lumina Foundation (Keierleber, 2014, para 3-4).

Colleges and universities have invested resources to support undergraduate student success but often have limited time and resources dedicated to evaluating the effectiveness of these investments. Due to federal and state laws, student success has been operationalized primarily to focus attention on four- and six-year graduation and retention rates (Blankstein & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2020). Success, however, is much more than just graduation rates, and one must consider life after college. Highly selective educational institutions, in particular, use career development and future career placement to recruit extraordinary students to their campuses. As a result, students not only want to graduate but also want to graduate and quickly obtain a position in their chosen career.

Internships is a particular high-impact practices used by the university to develop undergraduate career readiness via transferable skills and improve job placement post-graduation. More important is higher education's commitment to the community (Sengupta et al., 2020) and its mission to develop ethically and civically engaged citizens, often through the high-impact practice of service learning. Therefore, higher education has made considerable investments to offer, vet, prepare, and assess student learning in these educationally intentional experiences. Additionally, many degree programs may also offer academic credit or even require internships or community service for particular majors' graduation requirements.

With labor law changes (Department of Labor, n.d.) and a commitment to livable wages (Brantley, 2021), more internship providers now must financially compensate student interns. More recently, serviceships, opportunities that combine internships in the community rather than a corporation (Hastings et al., 2018), are gaining popularity for developing college students at the intersection of community service and internships.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact, if any, that financial compensation has on the serviceship experience in terms of intern output, engagement, and overall performance from the intern supervisor's perspective. Much of the literature, to date, provides internship experience feedback from the intern's perspective but rarely from the employer's perspective, particularly in the non-profit setting as we consider the significance of high-impact practices on the student experience (Kuh, 2008), exploring this hybridized approach of internships and service-learning, or serviceship, surfaces as a newer approach to address desired outcomes for numerous stakeholders including the university, the community, and the student body. The university is often charged with developing ethically responsible students and ensuring students are well-prepared to enter the workforce successfully. The university-community relationship is evolving as more universities seek to determine their responsibility in supporting proximate communities. Community partners often seek volunteers to help with projects and tasks, which offers field experience for students and an opportunity for experiential learning.

Engagement in high-impact practices has shown improved student retention and increased 4-year graduation rates, so we aim to understand how the hybridized serviceship format can continue to support the community while offering enriching experiences to students and achieving goals for the university at large. We sought to add context to the serviceship experience from the non-profit internship supervisor perspective by answering two primary research questions:

- (1) how do non-profit internship supervisors describe the non-profit organization context for internships? and**
- (2) what impact, if any, financial compensation has on the internship experience in terms of intern output, engagement, and overall performance from the intern supervisor's perspective?**

METHODS

We employed a constructivist, qualitative study (Creswell, 2013) utilizing focus groups with non-profit internship supervisors to answer our primary research questions.

Non-profit internship supervisors recruited for this study were representative of those who hosted student interns during the summer that research was conducted. The invited population received an email inviting their participation and sharing the associated \$25 Visa incentive. Confirmation of interest was indicated by their completion of an intake survey in which they selected one of two virtual focus groups to participate. Two email invite reminders were sent as follow up for those who had not yet signed up to participate. Participants who completed both the intake and focus groups were gifted a \$25 Visa gift card as a participation incentive.

PARTICIPANTS

Ten intern supervisors completed one of two focus groups. Table 1 presents demographic information for the study participants.

Table 1. Participant table

Pseudonym	Title	Age	Gender	Employed Length	Intern Supervisor Length	Other Supervisor (non-intern)	Trained
Dexter	Logistics Coordinator	29	Male	More than 3 years	1 year- 3 years	Yes	No
Barbara	Volunteer Manager	32	Female	1-3 years	1 year- 3 years	No	No
Lisa	Director of Out of School Time Programs	-	Female	1-3 years	1 year- 3 years	Yes	Yes
Stacey	Volunteer & Advancement Manager	27	Female	1-3 years	Less than 6 months	Yes	No
Rory	Outreach & Education Engagement Manager	27	Female	More than 3 years	1 year- 3 years	Seasonal	No
Millicent	Executive Director	45	Female	1-3 years	6 months to 1 year	Yes	No
Rachel	Education & Internship Manager	28	Female	More than 3 years	3+ years	Yes	No
Nathan	Administrative Assistant	67	Male	1-3 years	3+ years	No	Yes
Cesar	Center Director	66	Male	More than 3 years	3+ years	Yes	Yes
Michelle	Volunteer & Communications Associate	30	Female	More than 3 years	Less than 6 months	No	Yes

FINDINGS

Non-profit organization context for internships

To answer research question one, how do non-profit internship supervisors describe the context of internships in the non-profit organization? We used themes from two focus groups with non-profit intern supervisors. Table 2 presents themes, categories, and descriptions.



Table 2. Start codes, themes, and description of non-profit organization context for internships

Theme	Categories	Descriptions
Non-profit organization structure	Internship partner	This emergent category is related to organizational structure and how non-profit internship site expectations, processes, and procedures are modified to meet the requirements of internship partner organizations.
	Intern program formality	Intern supervisors described a continuum of internship program formality, ranging from the formalized recruitment process, structured onboarding, and defined intern positions in the organizational hierarchy. In contrast, others had no formal program or just used the structure imposed by the internship partner organization.
	Compensated vs uncompensated	This category encompassed the reality that many non-profit intern sites did not have a budget allocation for interns. Instead, most non-profit internship sites relied on internship partners to offer course credit, financial compensation, or other means of expanded compensation.
	No intern at all	Several intern supervisors expressed that having an intern was a new experience at their non-profit internship site.
Friendly vs. unfriendly aspects	Friendly	This category encompasses the intern-friendly aspects of the non-profit context. Internship supervisors expressed benefits spanning intern site flexibility, ranging from engagement opportunities (events, meetings, etc.), work hours, and work modality.
	Unfriendly	On the other end of this dimensionality, non-profit organizations may be less intern-friendly. Specifically, intern supervisors shared a lack of formal internship structure, allocated budget, physical workspace, or the inability to align projects to the skill of the intern.
Intern as an additional staff/team member	N/A	Another emergent theme was how participants expressed that they view interns as additional non-profit staff members. Many participants mentioned how they were uncertain about how to account for organizational workload without an intern.
Extra intern benefits	N/A	Non-profit intern supervisors mention how interns receive added benefits beyond compensation, possibly unique to the non-profit context, like flexible work arrangements, resume experiences, professional development, networking/relationships, and site tours.
Project customization	N/A	Participants described how they each allowed a degree of project customization for the intern. Specifically, project customization was done by identifying the intern's skills, knowledge, motivation, youth expertise using emergent social media and communication platforms, workload delegation, and organizational needs. Participants aligned, in significant ways, the needs of the department and assignments with the desires of the intern.
Supervisory experience	N/A	Participants engaged the intern in a personal supervision experience that was guided by their own background. Specifically, participants leaned on their personal lens of supervision and internship experience to guide the supervision process.
Treatment and expectations	N/A	Participants navigated the treatment and expectations of non-profit interns by balancing their own self-accountability measures with organizational and supervisor expectations. Expectations changed based on the academic pursuits of the intern, familial considerations, and compensation.

Intern output, engagement, and overall performance

Research question two sought to understand what impact, if any, financial compensation has on the internship experience in terms of intern output, engagement, and overall performance from the intern supervisor's perspective.



Table 3. Perceptions of intern return on investment

Pseudonym	More ROI	Informs Belief
Dexter	Paid	I believe people who are compensated are able to better focus on their work
Barbra	Equally beneficial	We do not normally have a lot of unpaid interns but those that we have had worked hard.
Lisa	Equally beneficial	We've had both paid and unpaid interns, and all interns have been great and hard-working. They have all accomplished great work and have helped the organization.
Stacey	Equally beneficial	N/a we only had paid interns
Rory	Unpaid	If we are speaking strictly about financial payment, I would say unpaid interns have more return on investment. From what I have observed, our unpaid interns do have more of a passion for the work that we do and are a little more "on it" than paid interns.
Millicent	Paid	Comparison
Rachel	Paid	Just from a recruitment standpoint alone it is much easier to convince both colleges and students to want to join us for a semester. I also believe that if students are paid, they also have a sense of ownership and if feel like they are being compensated then they are more willing to complete the tasks given to them.
Nathan	Paid	More likely to work their hours
Cefar	Equally beneficial	The Paid interns were more highly incentivized to complete their assignments, while we did not provide direct pay, we did offer compensation in the form of travel to conferences and other noncash compensation.
Michelle	Paid	We couldn't do some of our programming without certain interns. We've never had an unpaid intern

Additionally, several focus group questions were posed to intern supervisors to understand their perceptions of how financial compensation impacted the return on investment from interns.

Table 4. Start codes, themes, and description of intern performance

Theme	Categories	Description
Engagement - Unanticipated benefits	N/A	Intern supervisors highlighted several unanticipated benefits arising from financially compensated interns, including not having to rush off to a second job, how prioritizing the internship during time management conflicts, and more.
Engagement - Internship compensator program elements	N/A	Participants discussed how internship program partners and sponsors maintained formal standards for internship oversight (site visits, pre-mid-post), which impacted intern engagement. They managed more defined processes for vetting candidates, employer orientation, and pre-intern start communications.
Overall Intern Performance - Intern passion, interest, and alignment	N/A	Intern output and return on investment generally varied according to participants, often by the intrinsic (e.g., personal passion, connection to non-profit mission, future career goals, etc.) and extrinsic motivations (e.g., coursework, financial compensation) of the student intern.
Overall Intern Performance - Compensated vs uncompensated comparisons	Recruitment	Participants cited that when seeking compensated interns, they were not able to find qualified interns with special skills they needed without offering compensation, plus the type of candidate who applies seems to be noticeably different to the internship supervisors when compensation is offered, and/or they did not need to recruit at all as the internship compensator managed the recruitment and selection process.
	Prioritization	When comparing compensated and uncompensated interns, prioritization was an emergent category from intern supervisors. Prioritization manifested in the form of the intern not having to rush off to a second job or how the internship was ranked during time management conflicts.
	Completing entire internship	When making comparisons, compensated interns were more likely to be committed to work projects and completing entirety of internship experience.
	Value and importance	Participants also asserted that compensated interns placed more importance on the internship, took the experience more seriously, demonstrated higher degrees of self-accountability and responsibility.
	Work quality	Intern supervisors were also more likely to share that compensated interns produced higher-quality work products that seemed more polished, complete, more likely to meet deadlines, or demonstrated more initiative.
No difference	It is important to note that some participants were clear in initial responses to assert there were no clear or apparent differences between compensated and uncompensated interns	

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, we offer three recommendations for practice and future research:

- Focus on the recruitment challenges tied to compensation differences:** Professional practice should consider how the ability to offer compensation impacts the diversity and skill levels of intern applicants.
- Investigate the long-term impacts of financial compensation on career trajectory:** While some supervisors found no difference in performance between compensated and unpaid interns, future research could explore whether paid internships lead to better long-term outcomes in intern career development and organizational engagement.
- Establish joint funding mechanisms to support internships:** Higher education leaders and non-profit organizations can collaborate to secure funding for paid intern positions. This might involve co-applying for grants, sharing resources, utilizing Federal Work Study dollars, or creating endowments dedicated to internship stipends. Such financial support can enhance the appeal and accessibility of internships, benefiting both students and non-profits

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