Increasing Access to High-Impact Practices: A Case Study on Internships at the University of Mississippi

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INCREASING ACCESS TO HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES:
A CASE STUDY ON INTERNSHIPS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI:

A Dissertation
Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Higher Education
The University of Mississippi

by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation-in-practice case study aimed to assess internships opportunities at the University of Mississippi (UM) to determine potential barriers for access among African American students and students with low socioeconomic backgrounds. Internships are a high impact practice, as identified by the American Association for Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) that provide students with tangible, real-world experience to prepare for careers after graduation. Experiential learning theories (Kolb, 1984; Dewey, 1938) and high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008) establish the importance of student engagement outside of traditional classroom settings. The patterns and frequency of internship participation are not clear for University of Mississippi students. Research suggests that minority students do not participate in high-impact practices because of differences in social, financial, and cultural capital (Luo & Drake, 2014). The study sought to identify patterns in internship opportunities and participation while determining barriers to participation.

The first component of research analyzed internship course enrollment data from the University of Mississippi Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning (IREP) office. After analyzing this data, ten focus groups were formed with undergraduate students to discuss and assess internship resources at the University of Mississippi. Students who self-identified as having completed internships were invited to individual interviews. Focus group and interview data were analyzed to make recommendations to the UM community from the identified themes of: 1) internship knowledge, 2) university support, 3) financial challenges, and 4) personal networks.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I decided to embark on this educational journey three years ago, I was unaware how my life would change in such a short amount of time. I was filled with fear, angst and excitement all at the same time, but I was intrigued with the experiential learning opportunities at the University of Mississippi.

I would like to begin by thanking the faculty in the Department of Higher Education. I was truly challenged and supported during this process and if it were not for your foresight to bring this program to the University of Mississippi, I would not have had the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream. In August 2015, over forty education professionals met in the Jackson Avenue Center to learn about a new opportunity to further their education. Many of us have experienced life changing events during this process and have will forever be the first group to graduate from this program. Cohort 1 will forever be etched in my story and I am thankful. While I cannot name each person individually, please know that I have grown as a professional from being challenged by each of you. To my car group- Bradley Baker, Lynnette Johnson, Kyra Kendrick and Peter Tulchinsky, without our early mornings, late nights, group projects and debates, this would not have been possible.

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MANUSCRIPT I: AN OVERVIEW OF ETHICS, EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR INTERNSHIPS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI
INTRODUCTION

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn,” is a Chinese proverb that draws parallels to the experience of participating in academic internship programs. Both society and students seem to value employability and job attainment as desirable outcomes for pursuing higher education, therefore it is increasingly important to measure student success and the effectiveness of higher education in terms of post-graduation employment. Although employability and job attainment after successful completion of baccalaureate programs can be useful in measuring student success, there is no universal assessment of these metrics, resulting in a great deal of inconsistency and variability among higher education institutions (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005).

Educational outcomes differ among stakeholders and institutional types and are mostly dependent upon the goals, missions, and learning outcomes deemed valuable at individual institutions. Employment rates and pathways to immediate employment are topics increasingly discussed in the realm of higher education as a result of gainful employment policies set by President Obama’s administration and U.S. Department of Education (ED) in 2011 (ED, 2011). In light of an increasing focus on the income generation of employment after graduation, internships can be a pathway for successful employment immediately after baccalaureate completion (Chillas, Marks, Galloway, 2015; Heyler & Lee, 2014; Shoenfelt, Stone, Kottke, 2013).

Internships are broadly defined, but generally include direct, applied experience in a work setting (Kuh, 2008). Internships are typically related to student career interests and provide
benefits of guidance and training from established professionals in students’ anticipated field of profession (Kuh, 2008). Internships for academic course credit mostly require completion of a project or paper approved by a faculty member (Kuh, 2008). The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) includes internships, practicum experiences, and student teaching in its supervised field experience definition. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) defines internships as:

- a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting.
- Internships give students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience and make connections in professional fields they are considering for career paths; and give employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent (NACE, 2011).

This study sought to identify opportunities at the University of Mississippi to enhance academic internship participation among African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This study also sought to describe the internship experiences from the perspective of these student populations at the University of Mississippi. The driving issue for this study was the perception that students of color do not participate in formal academic internship programs at the University of Mississippi as frequently as Caucasian students and students who are not from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, it was perceived that students of color do not have equitable career placement opportunities as the majority student population due to a lack of accessibility.
PROFESSIONAL POSITIONALITY AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE POP

The University of Mississippi (UM) is a four-year flagship institution founded in 1848 as the state’s first comprehensive university (UM, n.d.). Total enrollment for the 2016-2017 academic year was recorded at 24,250 including the University of Mississippi Medical Center (UM, 2017). University administrators work to promote the institution as a destination for elite students, faculty, and staff to advance their education and research with its 2016 R-1 designation by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (Smith, 2016). While the University has progressed academically, there was a significant difference in the enrollment of Caucasian students (15,775) and African American students (2,771) as reported in the 2016-2017 University of Mississippi enrollment records in the UM Tableau database.

The sometimes seemingly adverse relationship between the University of Mississippi and the African American student population can be traced back to the 1962 enrollment of James Meredith, the first known African American to be admitted to the University (Flaherty, 2016). It was important to acknowledge the University’s racial history because this study focused on the accessibility of internships for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Because we presumed that the University values the success of African American students, we find it necessary to address preliminary perceptions of who utilizes internships and to show concern for the possibility that some student populations (i.e. African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds) may be experiencing barriers in accessing internship opportunities in comparison to Caucasian or more affluent peers. If inequity exists for internship participation, further issues may potentially develop for long-term academic success.
and employability since several studies indicate that high-impact practices, such as internships, provide opportunities and experiences that propel students to successful academic and post-graduate outcomes (Finley & McNair, 2013; Kuh, 2008; Shoenfelt, Stone, & Kottke 2013).

The researchers assumed the roles of scholar-practitioners in this study. Kristina Phillips serves as the Assistant Director of College Programs in the University of Mississippi Division of Outreach and Continuing Education which includes Internship Experience programs supporting students interning in Atlanta, New York City, and Washington, D.C for academic credit. Phillips worked with the Internship Experience programs for nearly four years where she noticed marginal participation for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Jennifer Saxon serves as Assistant Athletic Director for Student-Athlete Development in the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics where her primary responsibility is to provide student-athletes with programming to them for life after collegiate athletic involvement and to enhance student-athletes’ accessibility to gainful employment while becoming productive members of society. The Life Skills division includes four areas: career development, community engagement, diversity and inclusion, and personal development. Career development for student-athletes has become a priority of the department evidenced by the creation of the Ole Miss Athletics Training Program in the summer of 2017. The program aims to provide internship opportunities for student-athletes in the Oxford/University community who are training in the summer for upcoming athletic competitions.

The nature of the researchers’ professional practices allowed for the identification of some broad challenges experienced when working to implement internship programs at the University of Mississippi. First, the institution had no clear consensus on the definition of internships. Internship promotion and implementation varied among academic units because the
institution did not promote consistent standards of accountability for internship implementation or assessment. The scholar-practitioners, were curious to examine how students define internships at the University since the institution did not offer a uniform definition.

The University’s Office of State Authorization and Licensure reports internship course enrollment information from each academic unit offering internship courses to the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NCSARA). Reporting efforts attempt to assure compliance with federal, state and university policies and regulations regarding state authorization but do not assess the quality of internship course activity. Internship courses are identified by using the NCSARA and American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) definitions of internships. Because of a lack of internship quality assurance at the institution, there may be opportunities to expand internship reporting efforts to include quality measures. This may require collaborative efforts inclusive of all academic programs to clarify best practices for internships at the University of Mississippi. This study examined student perspectives of the quality and nature of internships at the institution to help inform administrators on ways to enhance internship participation as described by a sample of UM students.

The Internship Experience program in the Division of Outreach and Continuing Education was one of two university sponsored internship support programs at the institution. The program offers preparation and transition support to students interning in New York, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta at the time of the study. The Washington Internship Experience was available for the Spring and Full Summer academic terms, and the Atlanta and New York Internship Experiences were available during the Full Summer academic term. New York and Washington Internship Experience programs included a $4,695 program fee for housing.
accommodations for the academic term of the internship, programming activities for on-campus
pre-departure meetings, “Welcome Week” on-site orientation activities, and administrative fees.
Atlanta’s program fee was $3,895. Students are also required to enroll in at least three hours of
academic credit for their internship course, which is accompanied by tuition costs ranging from
$955.50 to $2,739 for three credit hours, depending on their place of residency. In addition to
the program fee and tuition, participants must also pay for personal travel expenses to-and-from
their internship site location and day-to-day living expenses such as meals and transportation to
their internship site. Program staff often encouraged students to budget for a minimum of $100
per week for meals and transportation, which was approximately $1,500 for an academic term.
Assuming that round-trip transportation to New York or Washington, D.C. was approximately
$600, the minimal estimated total cost for a Mississippi resident to participate in the New York
or Washington Internship Experience was approximately $7,750. Students typically acquire
unpaid internships in exchange for academic credit while forfeiting paid opportunities in the
form of summer jobs to gain meaningful work experience in their field of academic interests
(Internship Experience at the University of Mississippi, n.d.).

The University of Mississippi’s Patterson School of Accountancy also offered an
internship program that is voluntary where students must also receive academic internship credit
to participate. Accounting students have opportunities to secure internships in a variety of
locations across the state, region, and country. In the spring semester, one year prior to the
internship semester, the Dean of the School of Accountancy and a University of Mississippi
Career Center representative hosts an informational meeting with interested students. The
meeting focuses on the requirements of the internship program and guidelines for preparing
student resumes. University of Mississippi staff collaborate with the University’s Career Center
to share internship candidate résumés in a central electronic location for employers. Employers begin contacting students in late spring and early summer to eventually schedule internship interviews in September. Students may also elect to pursue internship opportunities during the summer and fall but there is no communication between UM staff and employers during these academic terms and students are solely responsible for locating and securing those internships (Patterson School of Accounting Internships, n.d.). The accounting internship program was well established, and works to place students with structured internship opportunities in collaboration with the Career Center. According to the Patterson School of Accountancy’s website, it has been “nationally ranked in the primary national accounting ranking every year since 2005, achieving top 20 rankings each year since 2008,” (Accounting, n.d). There seemed to be a connection between the school’s robust internship program and national ranking; however, the school’s African American enrollment only accounted for 6% of its 1,229 total enrollment in Fall 2016 according to UM’s Tableau database.

From our perspective, the two formal internship programs offered at the University served to complement advising and career services offered by the institution’s 86 undergraduate degree programs and Career Center initiatives. The programs help to enhance student experiences with career exploration and confirmation in academic units as well as forge relationships between students and industry professionals. Only 15% of the University’s undergraduate degree programs required internships or student teaching for completion as of academic year 2017. The majority of internship courses at the University of Mississippi are voluntary and taken as non-required electives, but the following academic programs require internships for successful degree completion:

- Bachelor of Arts in Sport and Recreation Administration
- Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science
- Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice
- Bachelor of Science in Dietetics and Nutrition
- Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management
- Bachelor of Science in Social Work
- Bachelor of Business Administration in General Business*(Study Abroad or Internship)
- Bachelor of Arts in Education in Elementary Education
- Bachelor of Arts in Education in English Education
- Bachelor of Arts in Education in Mathematics Education
- Bachelor of Arts in Education in Science Education
- Bachelor of Arts in Education in Social Studies Education
- Bachelor of Arts in Education in Special Education

Students pursuing a general business degree must either choose to enroll in an internship or study abroad experience for academic credit to fulfill degree requirements (B.B.A. in General Business, n.d.). Students enrolled in Bachelor of Arts in Education (B.A.E.) programs are required to enroll in a student teaching course, which places students in a classroom for a semester to gain teaching experience in classrooms. Although African American students have considerable enrollment in programs requiring internships, such as parks and recreational management, exercise science, social work, and criminal justice (Common Dataset, n.d.), these majors tend to be in the 10 lowest-earning degree programs for African Americans (Carnevale, Fasules, & Porter, 2016). Early and effective career planning, including internships, is especially essential for African-American students in low-paying fields to overcome student loan debt and underemployment after college completion (Carnevale et al., 2016).
The personal and professional views of the researchers were modified since beginning this study. Inquiry for this study began with the perspective that African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were not participating in internships at the same rate as Caucasian students and students who are not from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The assumption was made that African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds may have access to fewer family resources or be experiencing geographical/transportation constraints also preventing them from having access to internship opportunities. The initial assumptions of this study were challenged from preliminary data showing that African American internship enrollment mirrors overall African American enrollment at the University of Mississippi (See Chart 1.1 and Appendix B). Data was also explored that illuminated degree programs with high African American enrollment, such as the Bachelor of Science in Social Work or Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice programs that required internships for successful completion. These findings prompted a shift in inquiry from examining internship course enrollment rates to (1) examining the experiences of University of Mississippi’s African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds with internship resources and (2) learning about the experiences of African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who completed internships while enrolled at the University. These findings prompted more thorough exploration of the problem of practice to ensure a diverse population sample, inclusive of Caucasian students who may be from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Going beyond the initial assumptions required a better developed data collection to fully explore our ideas and counterbalance our assumptions.
CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE WITHIN EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Experiential learning theory guided the design of this study. Experiential learning theory suggests that learning materials with in-depth levels of understanding have powerful implications on student learning and outcomes. The theory is established in the concept that learners internalize cognitive processes in a cycle of four phases: (1) concrete experience, (2) reflective observation, (3) abstract conceptualization, and (4) active experimentation (Kolb, 1984; McLeod, 2013). Moving and learning through these phases is continuous, and knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Chan, 2012). A successful cycle of experiential learning theory is demonstrated when a learner advances through the four stages initiated by experiencing a new, tangible experience. The learner observes and reflects on the experience in the second phase, resulting in analysis of the situation and making generalizations (synthesizing) in the third phase. The final and fourth phase is where learners apply new ideas and premises in future situations, which then leads to a new experience. (Kolb, 1984; McLeod, 2013).

In his 1984 book, The Process of Experiential Learning, Kolb explained that the motivation for developing new concepts is provided by new experiences, and the learning that takes place during these new experiences can be applied in a multitude of ways. Kolb asserted that, “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Because experiential learning theory asserts that learning
happens through experience, the assumption can be made that internships have the potential to move students through each phase of this theory.

Experiential learning opportunities are not perceived as accessible to underserved students and sometimes considered boutique programs only available to students with time, financial resources, and personal and professional networks to pursue these engaging experiences (Kuh, 2008; Najmabadi, 2017). Affluent students are positioned to advance in their academics quicker than their less-affluent peers. Participation in experiential learning opportunities results in confidence gains, better understandings of interests, academic enthusiasm, connections that lead to employment, and development of skills applicable to future careers (Najmabadi, 2017). Meanwhile, underserved student populations, who can arguably benefit tremendously from experiential learning opportunities, often have financial and time constraints preventing them from pursuing and enrolling in high-impact practices. It is also unclear if underserved students are equally aware of experiential education opportunities (Najmabadi, 2017).

Experiential learning strategies, such as internships, allow students to learn through hands-on, engaging activities to connect academic with relevant experience (Kolb, 1984). Because internships are included in experiential education pedagogy and also considered a high-impact educational practice (HIP), John Dewey and David Kolb’s foundational contributions to experiential education’s theoretical frameworks in education and psychology paired with George Kuh’s contributions to the development of high-impact practices as teaching and learning principles, contribute to exploring holistic and active learning strategies for improved student outcomes. Internships can be legitimate learning experiences in which current college students become global learners (i.e. international internships), develop and apply critical thinking skills,
and increase employability (Brigham, 2011; Hovland, 2010; McCormick, 1993; Shoenfelt, Stone, Kottke, 2013).

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) serves as a central resource for HIP research and best practices and identifies ten teaching and learning strategies as high-impact practices for increased student engagement (Kuh, O’Donnell, & Reed, 2013). The AAC&U considers first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity and global learning, community-based learning, internships, and capstone projects as HIPs. Additionally, institutions may consider other learning practices, such as student leadership opportunities, as HIPs unique to their school depending upon the nature of their student populations and experiences specific to meeting institutional needs (Kuh, O’Donnell, & Reed, 2013). Results of several studies of students participating in at least one or more of the practices considered to be high-impact by the AAC&U have shown to be beneficial to student engagement and learning outcomes (Kuh, 2008).

High-impact educational practices and experiential learning opportunities are valuable for diverse populations of students, especially students that have been historically underserved by colleges and universities, however, equitable access is not available to all students (Kuh, 2008; Najmabadi, 2017). Arguably students that may benefit the most are excluded from these experiences (Kuh, 2008). Low minority participation in similar high-impact educational experiences, such as study abroad, is perceived because of disparities in social, financial, and cultural capital (Luo & Drake, 2014). This lends support to the case that students who may need to participate in high-impact practices do not do so for reasons related to socioeconomic status, race, and socialization. The problem faced at the University of Mississippi is how to enhance
internship participation for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The overarching goal of this study was to reduce barriers for these students and enhance participation.

Higher education stakeholders, including government agencies, employers, two and four-year institutions, college students, and their families are interested in employability and post-graduation outcomes (Arum & Roksa, 2014; U.S. Department of Labor, 1999). Several benefits accompany college completion, including increased lifetime earnings, social mobility, healthier lifestyles, parental involvement, and increased educational attainment for children with parents that have successfully completed post-secondary education (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016).

Student success generally contributes to economic gain and promotes workforce development (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridge, & Hayek, 2006). Student success is directly related to high-impact educational practices (HIPs), such as internships, and assist students to achieve essential learning outcomes such as critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and effective communication. Engagement through HIPs result in an increased likelihood of achieving intellectual capacities to improve democratic and economic gain (Kuh, O’Donnell and Reed, 2013).

HIPs acknowledge that experiential learning pedagogy is instrumental in boosting student success, illuminated by the evidence of improved grade point averages, retention, and students' self-reported gains in learning (Kuh, 2008). High-impact practices and experiential learning opportunities require active student engagement with learning materials, peers, and instructors while encouraging a holistic learning experience. Both mechanisms encourage deep learning and critical thinking, which require students to apply knowledge and connect ideas to their personal lives and future careers. George Kuh (2008) is widely known for his research on high-impact educational experiences and is credited for identifying six strategies to implement high-
impact experiences. Participation in high-impact experiences in college is often life changing, and research suggests that students finish college quicker than students that have not participated in high-impact experiences (Kuh, 2008). According to Kuh (2008), students need to experience one or more of the following to be highly engaged in learning:

- A great amount of student effort and time commitment
- Maintenance of substantive relationships with between students, their peers and instructors
- Quality and frequent feedback
- Opportunities for learning outside of the classroom
- Collaboration between students from diverse backgrounds
- Reflection to evaluate their learning process (Kuh, 2008)

Several universities across the nation offer stipends and scholarships to enhance internship participation (Hartocollis, 2017). Factors such as geographical restrictions and financial constraints related to relocation to an area with more internship opportunities are sometimes burdensome to students seeking work experience through internships (Mangione, VandeCreek, Emmons, McIlvried, Carpenter & Nadkarni, 2006). For example, the University of Chicago offers the Jeff Metcalf Internship Program, which provides over 2,000 paid internships for its students throughout each academic year (Hartocollis, 2017; The University of Chicago, 2017). Employers partnered with the University of Chicago pay the cost of students’ internship salary, which is at least the local minimum wage of $11 per hour. Students that have acquired unpaid internships received a $4,000 grant for internships lasting at least 10 weeks (The University of Chicago, 2017). Fundraising from alumni gifts and an award from the Jack Kent Cooke foundation helped Amherst College in Massachusetts to award approximately $1 million
to 229 students that acquired unpaid internships at nonprofit organizations and small start-up companies during summer 2017 (Hartocollis, 2017). The University of Mississippi’s Internship Experience Programs offered $2,000 scholarships to students with demonstrated financial need to help offset the cost of Internship Experience program fees and academic credit for internships (Internship Experience at the University of Mississippi, n.d.). Further examining why students chose to forego internship participation since supplemental funds may be available to ease the burden of costs related to internship participation may be helpful for this study.
PROBLEM OF PRACTICE THROUGH DOMINANT PUBLIC POLICY LENS

(Labaree, 1997)

Enhanced participation in academic internship programs could improve the effectiveness of existing high-impact practice models in higher education (O’Neill, 2012) and at the University of Mississippi in general. The value of internships as a whole was observed through David Labaree’s frames of democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility (Labaree, 1997). Labaree’s competing frames of democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility are embedded in education policy discussion and function as a majoritarian narrative (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). Although we examined the frames and their relationship to internships as a whole, our inquiry is more specific for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in manuscripts two and three.

Labaree described democratic equality as a public interest where higher education institutions prepare students for citizenship and global engagement. Social efficiency was described as a public benefit that focuses on vocational training for job attainment, which benefits taxpayers and society. Finally, social mobility is described as a private benefit where personal fulfillment promotes upward mobility in social and economic status (Labaree, 1997). Formal academic internship programs can help institutions of higher education more equitably distribute the benefits of Higher Education, while enhancing democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility.
Democratic Equality

David Kolb (1984) referred to John Dewey as one of the “modern fathers of experiential education.” Dewey’s research focused on connections between education and democracy (Kolb, 1984). Dewey explained in his 1938 book, *Experience and Education*, that good education should impact both societal and individualistic purposes (Dewey, 1938). Dewey analyzed traditional and progressive education. For Dewey, long-term and short-term quality should be considered in the educational experience. Dewey’s model of learning also focused on how learning transforms experiences into purposeful action (Kolb, 1984). His educational theory considers education a social process where engagement happens within and outside the traditional classroom. Both classroom learning and field experiences are important to learning. The application of academic knowledge to real-world situations is transferrable in helping society solve pressing issues. Dewey holds educators responsible for providing valuable experiences that enable students to contribute to society (Dewey, 1938).

Paulo Freire more recently translated Dewey’s experiential education foundation research into themes of social justice and equity. Freire (1985) developed his educational framework around the notion that oppressed people can use educational experiences to acquire control over their situations. His book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* challenged educators to develop teaching strategies that implement “problem-posing” education. Freire said, "people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation (Freire, 1985, p.83)." Dewey and Freire’s foundation work propose that experiential education should promote the transformation of experience into knowledge. Transformational knowledge is then used to improve society. Both Dewey and Freire emphasize
the importance of the quality of educational experiences concerning past personal experiences to allow someone to be a productive member of society.

Experiential education opportunities such as internships give students opportunities for transformational knowledge (Liang, Caton, & Hill, 2015). Internships also promote student acquisition of professional skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking (McCormick, 1993). The ability to apply academic knowledge to real-world problems is a critical thinking skill that benefits society because students are learning the skills to solve societal problems. The goal of experiential education practices, such as internships, is to enhance student development and desirable learning outcomes such as critical thinking. The American Association of Colleges and Universities suggests that high-impact practices such as internships encourage students to give back to their communities through collaborative efforts (Finley and McNair, 2013). Higher education practitioners must encourage and implement internship programs to allow students the opportunity to connect academic experiences to problem solving in the real world. Because the American Association of Colleges and Universities also suggests marginal participation from underserved student populations (Kuh, 2008), it is reasonable to assume that African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are not leveraging experiential and high impact education opportunities for equitable civic and career engagement, especially at the University of Mississippi where racial disparities are inherently present.

Social Efficiency

Experiential education programs such as academic internships can provide society with skilled graduates in an economy that has shifted from primarily manufacturing jobs to knowledge-based employment opportunities (DiConti, 2004). Labarre’s social efficiency framework views education as a public good designed to provide workers to sustain economic

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needs (Labaree, 1997). Community and industry partnerships through academic internship programs help train workers to fill specific needs within an industry. Experiential education experiences such as internships help students become successful in an economy that requires specialization supplemented by higher education curricula (Aoun, 2016). Long-term internships that integrate classroom experiences with industry give students team building skills, problem-solving experience, and independence. Training in these desirable employability characteristics helps to ensure that higher education is providing skilled workers for the economy (Aoun, 2016).

According to the 2009 Job Outlook survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), nearly 76 percent of employers indicated a preference to hire recent college graduates with previous work experience (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2009). Prior work experience seems to have given recent college graduates an advantage in obtaining employment since the early 1990s (Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010). Competition is robust between recent college graduates for entry-level positions (More college graduates than jobs, 2014), but experience remains an important determinant in hiring practices (Shoenfelt, Stone, Kottke, 2013). Eighty-five percent of employers surveyed by NACE in 2008 reported that they offered experiential training for college students through an internship or cooperative education (co-ops) (as cited in, Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010, p.77). Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa’s Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates was published in 2014 and explored the difficulties of recent graduates’ experience while attempting to find employment after college. The book illuminated three skills sought by employers: critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and effective communication.

Using the College Learning Assessment (CLA), Arum and Roksa made bold claims that students experience limited to no learning while enrolled in college. They further asserted that
difficulties in becoming employed after graduation is a result of the lack of learning happening during students’ undergraduate endeavors. The College Learning Assessment was administered to the collegiate class of 2009 to assess the amount of learning gained while earning a baccalaureate degree. The survey found that students with high scores on the CLA gained employment at a higher rate and secured more skilled positions than students that did not score as well. Students who completed college with poor performance in the CLA were three times more likely not have a job two years after graduation than students who completed their senior year in the top quintile (Arum & Roksa, 2013). Engaging academic practices such as academic internship programs benefit employers and students by instructing towards outcomes such as critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and effective communication skills desired by employers. Because job obtainment often measures learning outcomes after graduation, the resounding sentiment from Aspiring Adults Adrift is that universities need to shift their instructional methods to provide engaging experiences to adequately prepare students to secure employment. Student internship participation is an effective strategy for overcoming the lack of desirable qualities from those seeking entry-level positions.

The University of Virginia provides a guidebook for starting and maintaining a quality internship program. The guidebook explains that industry benefits from internship partnerships with universities in several more ways than just workforce training. Partnering with universities provides employers with a pool of motivated pre-professionals that bring new viewpoints on existing problems. University partnerships also increase the visibility of an organization, providing quality candidates for temporary positions. Partnerships additionally allow opportunities for current members of an organization to pursue creative projects. Internship partnerships are also cost-effective recruiting tools that allow employers to assess prospective
employees. The employer’s image is enhanced in the community while providing partnerships that contribute to educational initiatives (True, n.d.).

Although providing partnerships to develop a pipeline of graduates to specific careers seems to be ideal, it narrows student ability to change majors or fields in addition to isolating academic programs that may not be able to create such partnerships. Curricula favoring industry partnerships may put students enrolled in programs that foster soft skills as opposed to specific skills for a trade at a disadvantage. The Center on Education and the Workforce illuminated that African American students are least likely to be enrolled in STEM, health, and business programs, which are potentially more engaged with community and industry partners (Carnevale et al., 2016).

**Social Mobility**

Labaree’s social mobility framework focused on education as a private benefit where students seek credentials for status attainment. In this framework, students view internships as a credential to make themselves more desirable to employers with the ultimate goal of gaining social status. Students recognize that work experience is needed before seeking entry-level positions. Students ultimately seek internship opportunities to achieve personal career goals (Abowitz, 2005). Students are seeking to attain a “good life” by moving upward in social strata but recognize that individual effort determines success. For students to be successful in today’s unpredictable economy, they will have to participate in experiential learning strategies offered by higher education institutions (Abowitz, 2005). Members of the higher education community could more effectively promote student interest in experiential education by associating it with social status attainment and students’ visions of living a “good life” after college. Higher education faculty, staff, and administrators should promote experiential learning programs at
their institution as highly valuable experiences that directly impact social standing and achievement (Abowitz, 2005).

Abowitz (2005) described experiential learning strategies as liberal learning techniques that are becoming practical tools in students’ pursuit of the American Dream. Her research suggested that faculty, staff, counselors and students working with students in internship programs and career centers should expect to serve motivated students that seek personal goals rather than helping students with expectations of success based on family history. The U.S. Department of Labor and Statistics reported in 2009 that today’s college students would experience more career changes and change jobs more than their parents and grandparents. For example, the average person in today’s economy will change jobs nine times by the age of 32 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1999).

A 2015 study illuminated how anxiety, depression, and disconnection are more prevalent among unemployed emerging adults than any other age demographic group (Konstam, Celen-Demirtas, Tomek, S., & Sweeney, 2015). The emerging-adults demographic includes persons aged between 18-29 years (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults are at-risk for unemployment, job uncertainty, and they need to prepare for career adaptability because of the nature of the United States’ economy (Konstam et al., 2009). We suspect that career-readiness programs incorporated in higher education curricula assist students in facing career adaptability challenges in an economy with high regards for critical thinking and analytical reasoning. Students that participate in internships take their first steps towards social mobility because internships aid in building confidence related to obtaining employment and maintaining employment as interests, skills, and opportunities evolve.
Internship program implementation and the improvement of existing career preparation resources could combat criticism of higher education faculty and administrators for lacking career preparation initiatives and applied learning curricula. Critique of student career outcomes were outpouring in Arum and Roksa’s *Aspiring Adults Adrift*, which argued that national improvements in learning and student success outcomes are needed (Arum & Roksa, 2014). Holistically, higher education practitioners do not seem to be putting forth much effort in improving instructional methods that foster individual student motivation for desirable critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and effective communication skills. Students cannot achieve social mobility if they lack the aforementioned skills necessary for obtaining entry-level employment and eventually, advancing to higher-level positions. From the literature, internship participation is perceived as a catalyst for employability, which initiates long-term career success.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, college has never been more expensive (ED, 2017). Because higher education is less affordable now than it has even been, institutions face a critical challenge in addressing the increasing costs of higher education. Tuition at public-four year institutions has more than doubled over the past 30 years after adjusting for inflation (ED, 2017). Because of tuition increases the U.S. has experienced in the past three decades, it is not surprising that the average debt a student loan recipient who earned a bachelor’s degree also doubled to a total of approximately $27,000 (ED, 2017). The maximum Pell Grant award only covers about 30 percent of the cost of attending a four-year public institution (ED, 2017). Interestingly enough, the importance of a college degree remains the same, if not even more critical to obtain now than ever before, as it is estimated that two-thirds of job openings will require postsecondary education or training by the year 2020 (ED, 2017).
College graduates carry the onus of high tuition costs which often leads to student loan debt repayment. Graduates and prospective students are burdened by high costs and student loan payments so much that they fear these financial issues related to attending college are obstacles to success (ED, 2017). The Department of Education also noted that a significant opportunity gap exists between students from high-income families and students from low-income families. Approximately 50 percent of U.S. citizens from high-income families hold a bachelor's degree by age 25 compared to only 10 percent of bachelor’s degree earners from low-income families (ED, 2017). Regardless of higher education’s increased costs, college completion remains the most important determinant of socioeconomic mobility (ED, 2017).

The Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University published a study highlighting that 70% of African-Americans graduate from open-admission institutions. Open-admission institutions have limited majors and course offerings and resources for ongoing mentorship. Lack of consistent mentorship tends to result in African American students taking minimal risks and avoiding unfamiliar situations. Because African-American students are overly represented in low-paying college majors, their long-term economic prosperity is affected (Carnevale et al., 2016). African American graduates have less savings and disposable income while paying student loans for the education that resulted in low earnings. The conundrum of completing college in a low-paying field introduces a complex issue for the African-American middle class and contributes to economic inequality. Difficulties exist for African-American graduates in achieving higher levels of social mobility when a considerable amount of African American graduates come from low-paying degree programs (Carnevale et al., 2016).

Because Labaree’s frames did not address marginalized student populations such as African Americans and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, this study has an
opportunity to examine the perspective of African American and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds through the Labaree’s dominant public policy lens. The inquiry driving this dissertation in practice (DIP) proposed that internships could serve as a mechanism to enhance socioeconomic mobility for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. After reviewing the literature, this study may strengthen the argument that historically underserved student groups could experience substantial benefits from participating in structured academic internship programs as implicated by Kuh and the AAC&U (Kuh, 2008). Internships may offer a clear path to employment after graduation and narrow the widening gap of inequity in socioeconomic mobility.
EXPLORING THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI FOR THE POP

One of the perceived overarching needs at the University of Mississippi was to create a more coherent approach to enhancing high-impact practices, and specifically internship initiatives. The University of Mississippi Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience (CSSFYE) was an example of an existing UM unit that has helped centralize HIP efforts for first-year experiences and seminars. The CSSFYE has played an integral role in retaining first-year, first-time students, which is a considerable achievement considering the University’s fairly open-admission standards. For Mississippi residents seeking admittance to the University of Mississippi, prospective freshmen must:

1. Complete the College Preparatory Curriculum (CPC) with a minimum 3.20 high school GPA on the CPC.

2. Complete the CPC with a minimum 2.50 high school GPA on the CPC and a minimum score of 16 on the composite ACT (or 770 on the old SAT critical reading/mathematics or 860 on the new SAT).

3. Complete the CPC with a class rank in the top 50 percent and a minimum score of 16 on the composite ACT (or 770 on the old SAT critical reading/mathematics or 860 on the new SAT).

4. Complete the CPC with a minimum 2.00 high school GPA on the CPC and a minimum composite score of 18 on the ACT (or 860 on the old SAT critical reading/mathematics or 940 on the new SAT).
5. Meet certification requirements for the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

This option is available to all freshman applicants.

Even with these unselective admission standards, the CSSFYE supported the University in achieving a record-breaking fall-to-fall retention rate of 86.5% and advised approximately 80% of first-year students in 2014. This record-breaking retention percentage is comparable to institutions in the Southern Universities Group (SUG), but the accomplishments of the University are notable considering the university’s unique challenges of addressing remnants of a tainted racial history (Flaherty, 2016).

The CSSFYE’s director, Kyle Ellis, attributed some of the University’s success of overcoming pitfalls of academic disparities in the first year by providing tailored support for each student and early identification of academic and social challenges. Ellis stated that the Center’s foundational mission is to serve first-year students in several capacities, and it has worked to achieve campus-wide buy-in for all first-year initiatives funneling through the CSSFYE. Ellis’ comments regarding campus-wide buy-in for first-year initiatives influenced our inquiry to determine which student populations would benefit from similar tailored support, resources, and information sharing in areas of internships since successful collaboration and resource-sharing has been successful for initiatives led by the CSSFYE.

Also reported in 2014, sophomore to junior retention was 82.14% and junior to senior retention was 71.9 percent. Six-year graduation rates for the University tend to hover around 60 percent (Common Data Set, n.d.). The University of Mississippi also utilizes the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), where the purpose of this instrument is to “assess the extent to which students engage in educational practices associated with high levels of learning and development” (NSSE, 2017). Six of the ten HIPs are included in the survey; learning
community, service learning, research with faculty, internship or field experience, study abroad, and culminating senior experience. Students are surveyed in the first-year and again in their senior year. University of Mississippi NSSE results from years 2013-2016 illustrated that approximately 80% of UM first-year students expect to participate in internships, but only 44 percent actually complete an internship by their senior year (Busby, Kellum, Belk, 2017). NSSE data is self-reported, so it is difficult to determine which internships in this dataset were for academic credit and which internships came about independently. Members of the Institutional Research and Effective Planning staff stated that “the gaps between student expectations and experience in the areas of internships need to be examined more closely” (Busby, Kellum, Belk, 2017).

From preliminary inquiry, it appeared that undergraduate courses at the University of Mississippi concentrate mostly on content acquisition rather than skill development. Acknowledgement that the University has no clear, university-wide consensus related to the importance of internships was important for this study. Shifts towards measuring student learning outcomes and skill development may take much longer than a semester course to accomplish, which can leave administrators and faculty baffled by the size of the task. This study could serve as a resource for UM faculty, staff, and administrators in assessing current internship pathways and establishing and a framework for administrators in assessing internship access and student outcomes related to internship participation and effectiveness to overcome the University’s segmented approach to high-impact opportunities, namely internships. Because the study aimed to develop potential solutions or enhancements for internships, the following questions were developed to guide the study:
• How can faculty and staff at the University of Mississippi improve collaborative efforts and resources regarding internships?
• Which existing internship efforts can be enhanced or duplicated to promote increased participation?
• How do we make a compelling argument to Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to collaborate on improving access to internships?

Conflicting ideas about the purpose of higher education are discussed where some argue that universities should prepare students to engage in collaborative and creative environments, while others suggest that universities should supply the economy with employable citizens (Sutton, 2016). Research for this study indicated that high-impact practices and experiential learning practices, such as internships, can serve both purposes and improve student engagement, critical thinking, and employability, which can be both collectively and individualistically beneficial. Internships provide tangible, real-world experience to promote students’ economic competitiveness, problem-solving strategies to answer society's problems, and personal credential attainment. Rather than questioning the effectiveness of experiential education, the problem of practice introduced in this study sought to explain how to improve implementation of formal academic internship programs at the University of Mississippi.

The review of literature established that internships can be viewed through the lens of Labaree’s three frameworks (democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility), which is foundational in the argument that internship participation should be accessible to all students so that the benefits of higher education are more equitably distributed for the best benefit of society. The University of Mississippi described in a portion of its mission that it provides academic experience that emphasizes critical thinking; encourages intellectual depth and
creativity challenges and inspires a diverse community of undergraduate, graduate, and professional students; provides enriching opportunities outside the classroom; supports lifelong learning; and develops a sense of global responsibility (UM, n.d.). While the University’s mission speaks to the intent of the institution, it also aligns with the benefits of encouraging students to participate in high-impact practices such as internships. This case study may aid in determining the commitment of the University to its students and stakeholders in regards to high-impact practices and student engagement.
PRELIMINARY RESEARCH AND INQUIRY

Both qualitative and quantitative data helped to understand engagement patterns of African American students and students from low socioeconomic status and their ability to access internships at the University of Mississippi. First, the University of Mississippi’s Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, Planning (IREP) was engaged to identify patterns related to race, internship participation, grade point average, socioeconomic status, and academic majors. The data requested from the Office of Institutional Research and Effective Planning to outlined the following:

- What is the profile of the students who are participating in internships at the UM?
- Is there a Resident Grade Point Average difference between the students who participated in an internship and those who did not?
- What percentage of students participated in an internship while at UM?
- What percentage of African American students participated in an internship at UM?
- What percentage of African American students are of low socioeconomic status as defined by receipt of the Pell Grant?
- Is there a Resident Grade Point Average difference between the African American students who participated in an internship and those who did not?
- Is there a Resident Grade Point Average difference between the African American students who receive a Pell Grant and participated in an internship and those who did not?
Is there a Resident Grade Point Average difference between the African American students who receive Pell Grant and participated in an internship and African American students who do not receive a Pell Grant who participated in an internship?

Data obtained through IREP determined that approximately 15.7% of students enrolled in an internship course during academic years 2010-2016 were identified as African American (UM, 2017). In addition to the data request that included the grade point average of students enrolled in internship courses, the frequency of majors declared by students enrolled in internship courses and ethnicity of participants was explored. Patterns of increased African American enrollment in certain academic majors were found. The second manuscript reviewed and included results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) from 2010-2016. See Chart 1 for preliminary findings regarding African American and Pell grant eligible students enrolled in academic internship courses.

Chart 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White-No Pell</th>
<th>White-Pell</th>
<th>African American-Pell</th>
<th>African American-No Pell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next phase of data collection employed a community-based, multi-phase process including ten group interviews with undergraduate African American students and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. We invited students to engage in conversations to determine accessibility to internship resources and opportunities for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Prior to each focus group session, participants completed a demographic questionnaire and a consent form for compliance with the Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning.

After speaking with approximately 50 students from multiple focus group sessions, interviews were conducted with 8 students who indicated participation in one or more internships while enrolled at the University of Mississippi. Student participants were invited by emails disseminated through the University’s Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement to the following student groups:

- E.S.T.E.E.M
- Black Student Union
- Men of Excellence
- African American Sororities and Fraternities

The aforementioned student groups received email invitations asking for their participation in the study. Agreeing participants were notified of the date, time and location of the group meeting via email correspondence. Participants were incentivized with a meal and entered into a lottery for a chance to win three $100.00 Amazon gift cards. All qualitative data was recorded by audio. Focus group recordings were outsourced to Rev.com for transcription in
preparation for analyzing and coding. The qualitative portion of our data collection was the most time consuming part of the study, but yielded pertinent data.

Analyzing the data collected from the Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning provided a foundational scope for understanding internship participation among African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Examining the patterns of participation with qualitative descriptions of student experiences with internships and internship resources was impactful when assessing the University’s climate regarding internships and their accessibility for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Findings from both quantitative and qualitative descriptive data was included in our second manuscript.
LIST OF REFERENCES
References


Patterson School of Accounting Internships (n.d.). Patterson School of Accounting. Retrieved from http://accountancy.olemiss.edu/internships/


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: 2013, 2014, AND 2016 UM NSSE SUMMARY
Appendix A
2013, 2014, and 2016 UM NSSE Summary


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**Student Participation in High Impact Practices**
Katie Busby, Kate Kellum, & Grace Belt
Institutional Research, Effectiveness, & Planning

**TO WHAT EXTENT ARE UM STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN HIPs?**
RESULTS FROM 2013, 2014, AND 2016 NSSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>First Year Students</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Community</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research with Faculty</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship or Field Experience</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Abroad</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone senior Experience</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, fewer UM students participate in HIPs than their peers at other SUG institutions. Service learning is the only HIP in which UM students consistently participate at a higher rate than their peers. In their first year, approximately 80% of UM students expect to participate in internships. However, by their senior year, only approximately 44% actually complete an internship. Similarly, first-year students indicate plans to study abroad at a much higher rate than those who report participating in that HIP. The gaps between student expectations and experience in the areas of internships and study abroad need to be examined more closely.

UM students engage in HIPs early in their career with a greater percentage participating in two or more HIPs than their SUG peers. However, by the senior year, fewer UM students have participated HIPs when compared to their peers.

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**IDEAS FOR PRACTICE**

- HIPs for transfer students
- More opportunities later in UM career
- Incorporate HIPs into major requirements
- Offer HIPs in the co-curriculum

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**REFERENCES**

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**NSSE researchers recommend students participate in at least two HIPs and completing one is the first year.**
Appendix B

University of Mississippi 2016-2017 Mini Fact Book


FIVE YEAR NEW TRANSFER TRENDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1,632</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,544</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,151</td>
<td></td>
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Oxford & Regional Student Level, Fall 2016-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,838</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>2,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,632</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>1,822</td>
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UM MEDICAL CENTER, FALL 2016-2017

<table>
<thead>
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<th>College/School</th>
<th>Headcount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dentistry</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad Studies in Health Sciences</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Related Professions</td>
<td>615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Graduate Programs</td>
<td>615</td>
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Race/Ethnicity UMMC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Headcount</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2,218</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender UMMC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Headcount</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,838</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,632</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

UM FACULTY, 2016-2017 (Oxford & Regional)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountancy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Sciences</td>
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<td>29</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Admin</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Sciences</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FTE Teaching Faculty | 1,013 |
Student-to-Faculty Ratio | 19 to 1 |

*Not included in gender, ethnicity, tenure status and overall total.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Enrollment for Fall 2016 is at an all-time high, with a total of 24,250 students -- an increase of 412 students or 1.7% over last fall.
- 2,990 students are enrolled at the UM Medical Center in Jackson.
- Enrollment has grown by an astounding 40.5% over the past decade, and by 13.1% in the past five years alone.
- For this year's freshmen class, the average ACT score is 25.2 and overall high school GPA is 3.57 both of which are the highest in UM history.
- Demand remains strong at UM's regional campuses: Tupelo (678 students), DeSoto (648 students), Booneville (76 students), and Grenada (101 students).
- UM's first year retention rate has increased drastically from 60.8% for the 2011 cohort to 71.3% for the 2015 cohort.
- Four-year graduation rate for new freshman is at all-time high of 43.8%
## Oxford & Regional Enrollment, Fall 2016-2017

<table>
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### College/School Enrollment

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### Undergraduate Grad/Law/PhD

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### Five Year Fall Enrollment Trends

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<td>15,882</td>
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<td>2015</td>
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### Five Year New Freshmen Trends

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### Retention and Graduation

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<td>2009</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>2013</td>
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### Graduation Rates

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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>55.9</td>
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### Degrees Awarded, 2015-2016

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### National Merit Scholars Fall 2016

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### Overall High School GPA

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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
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### ACT

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
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<td>2014</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>24.7</td>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>25.2</td>
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### Total Enrollment including UMMC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Enrollment including UMMC</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
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APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT AND QUESTIONS
Appendix C

Focus Group Script and Questions

Thanks for taking the time to join us to talk about internships at the University of Mississippi. We would like to know how to make internship opportunities on our campus more available for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, so we want to hear your thoughts on how we could do that. Your participation will help the University better understand how to support all students interested in participating in internships. Before we get started I wanted to introduce myself. My name is Jennifer Saxon and I will be serving as the moderator of this conversation today. This is Kristina Phillips and she will be monitoring our recording device and taking notes on our discussion. Before we continue with the conversation I wanted to share some ground rules so that we are able to move forward with the conversation and provide ample time for feedback during our discussions. There are no right or wrong answers, only different points of view.

- This discussion will be recorded, so it is important that only one person speaks at a time.
- We are on a first name basis so feel free to move forward in conversation using our first names.
- You do not have to agree with all points of view but we want you to be respectful of everyone and allow everyone to share.
- It is also important to listen respectfully as others contribute their thoughts to our conversation.
- My role here is to guide the conversation as the moderator. Kristina’s role is note-taking.
- We also ask that for this hour that you fully engage in the conversation. If you need to step out for an emergency, please enter and exit the room quietly to prevent interfering with our recording.

Let’s start with introductions. Will you please introduce yourself by giving your name, classification, and major?

1. What do students know about internships at the University of Mississippi?
2. What do students perceive as the benefits of doing internships, if any? What do students understand about the role of internships in securing employment after graduation? To what extent does this vary by disciplines or majors?
3. How do students learn about internship opportunities?
4. What keeps students at the University of Mississippi from doing internships when they know about them?
5. What kind of internship supports need to be implemented at the University of Mississippi? In academic departments?
6. What kind of supports from the University of Mississippi do African American students and students from low SES who are interested in internships need?
7. What unique concerns, if any, do African American students and students from low SES backgrounds have about applying for and participating in internships?
8. What unique concerns, if any, African American students and students from low SES backgrounds have about securing full-time employment after graduation?
9. Does race or SES have a role in the opportunities available to participate in internships? Why or why not?

10. What kind of information do academic departments share about internships?
    a. Probe: Which students get this information?

11. What faculty, staff, programs and/or services encourage internship participation?
    a. Probe: This can be a wide range of services – career advising, internship requirements in your academic department, financial aid, programs and events, etc.…

12. What suggestions do you have on improving internship access at the University of Mississippi?
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS
Appendix D

Interview Questions and Prompts

Our names are Kristina Phillips and Jennifer Saxon, and we are doctoral students here at the University of Mississippi studying Higher Education. We appreciate you spending your time being interviewed today. We will record our conversation, which will be transcribed using pseudonyms to keep your identity confidential. Please be as honest as possible in responding to our questions. There are no right or wrong answers. Our goal is to understand the experience of students participating in internships at the University of Mississippi. Your responses will help inform the University community on how to improve internship resources and opportunities.

The interview should last approximately one hour. Feel free to stop us at any time during the interview to clarify terms or questions.

- Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
- Talk to me about your major and your thinking behind pursuing an internship as a part of your study.
- Who encouraged you to participate in an internship?
- How did you find your internship? Tell me more about the process, for example, was it difficult to find or apply for an internship?
- Please tell me about your internship, where was it and what did you do? What did you anticipate about it before you started?
- Are you happy with the experience you received at your internship?
  - What could have made the experience better for you?
- Can you tell me what you liked the most about your internship? The least?
- What University of Mississippi resources helped you during your internship? For example, did you use the Career Center to prepare for your internship?
- Please tell me about the finances related to your internship. For example, was your internship paid or come with a stipend?
  - What, if anything, helped off-set the cost of your internship if it was not paid? For example, you may have used personal money, scholarships, grants, or federal financial aid, like a student loan or a Pell grant.
- How do you feel race played a role in your internship, if it played a role at all?
- Tell me your thoughts on how the University of Mississippi could improve internship resources and opportunities.
- If you have another internship opportunity, what would need to happen to make it better than your previous experience?
SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Nationally and locally, internships are defined in a multitude of ways, but most definitions include elements of reflection, onsite guidance, and career exposure (O’Neill, 2010). As colleges across the U.S. are becoming more intentional in providing access for middle-to low-income students in hopes of increasing economic mobility, activities aiding in those efforts (such as internships) are cited by administrators and students as inequitable because unpaid internships tend to favor more affluent students (Greenhouse, 2010). The claim of inequitable internship practices was explored in this case student at University of Mississippi (UM) where the researchers examined the perceptions and experiences of undergraduate African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds when accessing internship resources at the University of Mississippi.

UM is a four-year public institution located in Northeast Mississippi. UM is the state’s flagship institution, founded in 1848 and recorded as Mississippi’s first comprehensive institute of higher education (UM, n.d.). In academic year (AY) 2017, UM had an official enrollment of 24,250, including the University of Mississippi Medical Center and satellite campuses (UM, 2017). It is important to note the enrollment for UM undergraduate African American students in 2016-2017 was recorded at 2,771. 18% of the 15,775 enrollments of Caucasian undergraduate students (UM Tableau database). As the first public institution of higher education in a state in the deep South, UM has faced some ongoing challenges with accessibility, equity, and racial
reconciliation. James Meredith, the first known African American student at UM, enrolled at the institution only 50 years ago during a time of national civil rights conflict (Flaherty, 2016). Since then, UM still encounters criticism with how it deals with its racial history, where it seems to perpetuate in two ways: a shared history and divided heritage (Cohodas, 1997, p. 259) that maintains dual cultures of oppression and separation within the campus (Newman, 2007). UM has continued to enroll minority students since Meredith’s enrollment, but some argue that UM’s commitment to the success of African American students has not been as consistently demonstrated. Mississippi ranks 49th in the nation in bachelor’s degree attainment, where only 20.4% of the state’s population has graduated from college with at least a four-year degree (Shappley, 2015). Because Mississippi’s population educational attainment is low, UM is confronted with tasks such as employing innovative methods to improve economic mobility for the state.
PROFESSIONAL POSITIONALITY

The scholar-practitioners have a combined fifteen years of experience working with students in the defined marginalized groups including, enhancing the students’ experience with high-impact practices within their respective work responsibilities. High-impact practices are activities mostly associated with positive student learning and retention if implemented effectively. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) report that high-impact practices should encompass these qualities to be effective: time and effort, ongoing learning outside of the classroom, meaningful engagement with faculty and peers, collaboration with diversity, and frequent and substantive feedback (Kuh, 2008).

Phillips is the Assistant Director for College Programs in the University of Mississippi’s Division of Outreach and Continuing Studies, where she helps to coordinate the Internship Experience programs in Atlanta, New York, and Washington, D.C. The Internship Experiences support students preparing for internships in these major metropolitan cities, first with an internship preparation course, EDHE 301: Career and Life Planning, and next with support by providing a cohort experience while living and working away from UM’s main campus in Oxford. The Internship Experiences provide scholarships to students demonstrating financial need as indicated on the results of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The program’s staff provides placement assistance by connecting students to UM alumni in the cities in which the students intern. Phillips has worked in some capacity with the Internship Experience programs for approximately four years. During her time working with the programs,
she observed that qualified and prepared applicants sometimes lack racial and socioeconomic diversity, which prompted her to examine demographic patterns of internship enrollment for this study.

Saxon oversees the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics’ Life Skills program while serving as Assistant Athletics Director for the Student-Athlete Development. Saxon’s ultimate goal is to implement programming for 400 student-athletes in the areas of career development, community engagement, diversity and inclusion, and personal growth. One the most important tasks in her work is assisting student-athletes with personal plans for life after playing collegiate sports. In the summer of 2017, she was a central resource in creating the Ole Miss Athletics Training Program, an initiative aimed to provide internship opportunities for student-athletes in the Oxford/ University community during summer school. Student-athletes have no required athletic competition and limited skill and weight training responsibilities during the summer. This time period allows student-athletes engage in learning activities to develop their personal life plan. The Ole Miss Athletics Training Program is intended to be an experiential learning opportunity. It is designated as a non-academic course credit bearing program. While Athletics has made the financial commitment to provide a living stipend for student-athletes who qualify, only six participants took advantage of the program in year one. In addition, Saxon still has to work around barriers limiting access for the student-athletes that don’t get to participate in The Training Program. In this way, Saxon still experiences challenges with meshing students’ required athletic commitment during seasons of competition with internship opportunities. This study’s review of student experiences at UM could potentially provide more data to her that can assist in the engagement of future participants, mitigating the potential barriers that exist for student-athletes in this particular demographic.
As scholar-practitioners, the authors function as colleagues in the University of Mississippi’s School of Education as doctoral students in addition to collaborating on internship opportunities for students in their respective roles. Phillips and Saxon both sought to improve information shared to students interested in internship opportunities, and their professional practices caused concern for how students were accessing and processing pertinent internship resources. The scholar-practitioners perceived that undergraduate UM African American students were not pursuing internships at the same rate as Caucasian counterparts. Their initial concern was also that UM failed to develop an established, consistent definition of internships, enhancing confusion among students, faculty, and staff about the classification of internship course offerings at UM. Because the university does not have an established definition for high-impact practices, specifically, internships, AAC&U’s specifications for these practices will be employed when determining if the experiences of students at UM should be considered a high-impact practice. Furthermore, academic departments appear to demonstrate wide variability in the implementation and assessment of internship programs. Both Phillips and Saxon have genuine interest in addressing their concerns of internship accessibility and quality at UM.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

David A. Kolb’s experiential learning theory guided this study’s qualitative research design. The experiential learning theory is defined as “the method where knowledge is formed through the transformation of understanding.” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). This theory was established in the concept that learners internalize cognitive processes in a cycle of four phases: (1) concrete experience, (2) reflective observation, (3) abstract conceptualization, and (4) active experimentation (Kolb, 1984; McLeod, 2013). Completion of Kolb’s four stages indicated that the learner is engaged in active, experiential learning. Internships have the potential to move students through the four phases of experiential learning theory, so the scholar-practitioners sought to examine how the University of Mississippi is implementing this theory through the lens of internship accessibility.
DATA OVERVIEW

Two paradigms were explored in initial inquiry for this study. First, before examining any data, the scholar-practitioners questioned if undergraduate African American students were accessing internships at the same rate as Caucasian students. The first step in the research process to examine inequity in accessibility involved submitting a data inquiry to UM’s Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning (IREP) in the fifth semester of the researchers’ study to determine if access to and enrollment in internship courses appeared equitable. As the problem of practice developed, it was clear the data inquiry for internship enrollment needed to include undergraduate African American students and students eligible for federal Pell grants. With guidance from IREP staff, the scholar-practitioners thought the best way to determine a students’ socioeconomic background was to identify their Pell grant eligibility. The researchers also requested results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and institutional data which indicates student intent to participate in internships in the first year and student participation in internships in the senior year. Select responses from NSSE regarding internships and career resources were included in the request.

A list of internship courses from the Office of eLearning and State Authorizations was submitted to capture student enrollment in internship courses for academic credit. At the time, the data would only be complete using NSSE data from academic years 2013, 2014, and 2016 and internship enrollment data from our eLearning and State Authorization list for academic
years 2011-2016. The following questions were asked to frame the descriptive quantitative overview of existing institutional data:

- What is the profile of the students who are participating in internships at the UM?
- Is there a Resident Grade Point Average difference between the students who participated in an internship and those who did not?
- What percentage of students participated in an internship while at UM?
- What percentage of African American students participated in an internship at UM?
- What percentage of African American students are of low socioeconomic status as defined by receipt of the Pell Grant?
- Is there a Resident Grade Point Average difference between the African American students who participated in an internship and those who did not?
- Is there a Resident Grade Point Average difference between the African American students who receive a Pell Grant and participated in an internship and those who did not?
- Is there a Resident Grade Point Average difference between the African American students who receive Pell Grant and participated in an internship and African American students who do not receive a Pell Grant who participated in an internship?

Grade point averages seemed to be the most consistent metric available to measure the academic success of UM students enrolled in internship courses because information regarding course content was extremely limited. Student success is measured in a variety of ways, but previous research shows positive connections between student engagement in supplemental educational activities, such as internships, and desirable outcomes, such as higher grade point averages (Kuh and others, 2005). Variations in performance metrics, including grade point
averages, is complex for measuring the success for African American students and students with financial need (Fiorini, Liu, Shepard & Ouimet, 2014). A consideration of internship course completion related to grade point averages reveals possible disparities for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in accessing internships and their subsequent college success.

The request was fulfilled by IREP. The researchers were provided access to student internship enrollment records through UM’s electronic Tableau Database. Collaboration in the database was mutual, where both scholar-practitioners could log into the database independently. This information is collected and maintained by IREP at UM, and we did not have access to modify the records provided to us. It is important to note that the third question in the data request was amended by the IREP to remove the home department of students who have completed internships courses because of the potential for compromising student identities. African American enrollment in certain academic disciplines is so small that student identities could be easily be identifiable if made publicly available.

Data provided by IREP on May 9, 2017, challenged the initial expectations of internship activity at UM. UM undergraduate students on the Oxford campus have enrolled in internship courses for academic credit 6,412 times between academic years 2011-2016. In AY 2016, 19,996 undergraduate students were enrolled at the Oxford campus. Assuming each internship course is a unique occurrence, approximately 32% of UM’s Oxford campus has completed an internship course prior to graduating. 79.1% of students enrolled in internship courses for academic credit are Caucasian while 15.8% were African American and 5% were another race (Asian, Multi-racial, Native American, American Indian of Alaskan native, unknown, or unavailable.) 85.6% of students enrolled in an internship course while classified as a senior.
Because African American students accounted for 12.9% of the overall enrollment for undergraduates at the Oxford campus and African American internship enrollment in AY 2016 was 15.6%, the original assumption that African American students were not accessing internships at a consistent rate was false. Moreover, 9.1% of African American students who enrolled in an internship course between AYs 2011-2016 were eligible for federal Pell grants while 18.1% of Caucasian students who enrolled in internship courses between AYs 2011-2016 were eligible for Pell grants. Table 1 illustrates the average grade point average for students who enrolled in an internship course versus students who were not enrolled in an internship course between AYs 2011-2016. Caucasian students who completed an internship course in their senior year consistently have higher GPAs than Caucasian seniors who have not completed internship courses. Similarly, African American seniors enrolled in internship courses have higher GPAs than African Americans who have not taken an internship course. For most academic years, with the exception of Caucasian students in AY 2012, both ethnicities who were not eligible for federal Pell grants had higher GPAs than those who were eligible. Although we did not have access to disaggregated data to run statistical analysis, these GPAs show a trend that Caucasian students completing internship coursework with GPAs than those with similar coursework but have demonstrated financial need. Overall, students enrolling in internship coursework tend to have better GPAs than those who have not participated in internships for academic credit.
Table 1
Mean GPA Comparisons by Race, Internship Enrollment, and Federal Pell Grant Eligibility

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<thead>
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<td>Caucasian Senior Internship</td>
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<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian Senior Internship w/Pell</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian w/o Internship</td>
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<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.07</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.74</td>
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<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.74</td>
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</table>

Chart 1 shows the quantity of academic internship course enrollments between AYs 2011-2016 by race, and federal Pell grant eligibility. Caucasian students are overwhelmingly enrolling in internship coursework at a higher rate than their African American peers, but this participation is representative of UM’s overall racial and ethnicity demographics. Students eligible for federal Pell grants are also enrolling in internships at a higher rate than African American students, confirming that Pell grant eligibility is not exclusive to African American students. The researchers wanted to be clear that biases are not perpetuated through this study with the idea that African American students and Pell grant eligibility are synonymous.
Although the scholar-practitioners asked for NSSE data in their initial request the results were limited so they decided to use existing charts (Chart 2) to illustrate UM’s most recent NSSE results from first and fourth year student surveys in 2013, 2014 and 2016. Compared to peer institutions in the Southern University Group (SUG), first-year UM students desire to participate in internships at a rate slightly higher rate. In contrast, senior UM students who completed the NSSE survey indicated participating in internships at a lower rate than students reporting their experiences through the NSSE survey from SUG peer institutions (Busby, Kellum & Belk, 2016). The available NSSE data shows considerable differences in student desire to participate in internships and actual internship completion by the senior year. The disconnect between students’ internship expectations and actual internship completion confirmed the necessity of this research to examine the University of Mississippi as a case study for access to high-impact
practices, specifically internships. The researchers proceeded with qualitative inquiry to further examine what is happening at the UM campus in regards to internships and high-impact practices.

Chart 2

![Chart 2](image_url)

*Students indicated participation or desire to participate (plan to do) in HIPs. Scale: Done or in progress, Plan to do, Do not plan to do, Have not decided.*

Chart 3 shows the academic majors at UM with the largest enrollments for junior and senior African American students. This additional tier of data was generated after the data in Chart 2 showed that African American students are accessing internships at a rate comparable to overall African American enrollment. Because of this finding, the researchers found it necessary to examine the majors where African American students are enrolled to better describe internship course enrollment for this ethnic demographic at UM. Social work, criminal justice, and exercise
science are offered by the School of Applied Sciences and require internships for successful degree completion. Internship requirements in these fields of study could potentially distort the overall portrait of internship activity at UM. Preliminary findings represented in Table 1 and Charts 1-3 provide a glimpse of data representing internship activity at UM. The next phase of qualitative inquiry gathers student perspectives to investigate the perceptions of internship resource availability for African American students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Chart 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>Criminal Justice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Studies</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because the preliminary findings were not anticipated, the second phase of the researcher’s inquiry was qualitative in nature and investigated the usefulness of internship resources at UM because the preliminary findings were not anticipated. Because undergraduate African American students were accessing internship coursework at a rate higher than the total undergraduate African American enrollment, more comprehensive research questions were
developed, including a shift in focus to examine students’ perspectives on accessibility to internship opportunities at UM. Our qualitative research questions moved to determine: (1) How can faculty and staff at the University of Mississippi improve collaborative efforts and resources regarding internships? (2) Which internship efforts can be enhanced or duplicated to promote increased participation? (3) How do we make a compelling argument to student-affairs and academic affairs to collaborate on improving access to internships? A shift in focus for this study alerted the researchers to be more thorough in exploring the problem of practice to ensure a diverse population sample inclusive of Caucasian students who may be eligible for federal Pell grants. Because the data showing disciplines with high African American enrollments require internships, the experiences of students was critical in assessing how internship resources are being disseminated for both students within these fields and the general student population.

In order to gather students’ perspectives on access to internships and the internship experience, it was determined that two opportunities to collect student perspectives were vital to the study. The best perceived methods for obtaining the necessary student reflections was to enact focus groups and individual interviews. Thus, the researchers employed a community-based, multi-phase process including ten focus group discussions with currently enrolled undergraduate African American students and those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Students were invited to participate in the focus group conversations via email and in-person recruitment during their respective pre-scheduled meetings, when available. All research was conducted with the approval of the Institutional Research Board (IRB) (protocol 17x-172 with amendment). Additional information was obtained through review of demographic questionnaires and consent forms were obtained prior to focus group and individual interview participation.
The following university affiliated groups were solicited to gain participation in data collection:

- **E.S.T.E.E.M**: the primary purpose of E.S.T.E.E.M. is to ensure support and provide opportunities to motivate and empower women at UM.
- **Black Student Union (BSU)**: the purpose of the BSU is to foster a sense of community at UM. It serves as the umbrella organization for many of the African American student organizations at the university.
- **Men of Excellence (MOX)**: assembled to provide educational, cultural and social community service programming that will enhance the personal, professional and social growth of African American and Hispanic minority males.
- **National Pan-Hellenic Council**: the UM chapter of the governing body for the entire community of historically African American Greek letter organizations.
- **Foundations for Academic Success Track (FastTrack)**: first year learning community that helps students transition from high school to college.
- **Luckyday Success Program**: assists students during the critical transition from high school to college.
- **Increasing Minority Access to Graduate Education (IMAGE)**: moves to prepare members in science, technology, engineering and mathematics to successfully enter graduate programs.
- **Ole Miss Opportunity Scholars**: program that seeks to award funding to students in need to provide access to a quality education at UM.
- **Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement (CICCE)**: is responsible for creating programs and services that support UM’s core value of inclusiveness.
• **Ole Miss Athletics Training Program:** created to provide student-athletes with an opportunity to participate in an internship during summer school when there is a limited number of athletic commitments.

• **National Association of Black Accountants:** to address the professional needs of people of color and to build leaders that shape the future of accounting.

The researchers conducted ten focus groups that totaled fifty-four undergraduate participants over the course of four months (Appendix A). All focus groups were recorded with a notebook computer property of the University of Mississippi Division of Outreach. Recordings were stored in BOX, UM’s secure, password-protected cloud network where access is only shared between the researchers and the dissertation chair. Saxon facilitated each focus group while Phillips maintained the recording device. This process was followed for each of the ten focus groups with the exception of the Luckyday groups. The researchers conducted the Luckyday focus groups at the same time because of the large number of participants.

Demographic questionnaires and consent forms were scanned and stored in BOX. The original forms were stored in Phillips’ office in a locked drawer to which only she has access. Focus group recordings were sent electronically to Rev.com for transcription. Phillips was responsible for transcription communication with Rev.com while Saxon was responsible for transcription and coding using Nvivo qualitative data analysis computer software purchased with a grant from the B.A. Rudolph Foundation. Transcriptions were also paid for by the grant. Jennifer compared and analyzed transcripts with Nvivo to determine how information shared by the study’s participants had similarities throughout each focus group and interview. The comparison and analysis of interview and focus group data developed into four overarching themes to help describe internship participation at UM.
Following the completion of the focus groups each of the researchers conducted four individual interviews each (Appendix B). Each researcher recorded the respective interviews with a laptop. Saxon’s notebook computer was owned by the UM Department of Intercollegiate Athletics. All recordings were stored in BOX, UM’s secure, password-protected cloud network where access is only shared between the researchers and the dissertation chair. All original forms were securely stored and housed in Phillips’ office under lock and key, to which only she has access. After interviews were completed, each researcher uploaded the respective forms and audio recordings to UM BOX for transcription via Rev.com. Following transcription, Saxon coded and analyzed data with Nvivo qualitative data analysis computer software purchased with a grant from the B.A. Rudolph Foundation. The analysis documents were stored within Nvivo software and UM Box.
CHALLENGES INTERPRETING THE DATA

When initially analyzing the available data, there was a discrepancy in the information from undergraduates about which majors required an internship for degree completion. Because the university does not possess a shared definition for internships, the scholar-practitioners were required to re-evaluate the course enrollment data along with the information that was provided by the university catalogue featuring academic major notations for programs requiring an internship. Because the IREP data revealed that undergraduate African American internship enrollment in AY 2016 was 15.6% based on the overall undergraduate African American enrollment rates, there was reduced concern for the number of students who were participating in internship courses. However, after determining that IREP would not allow for designation of Pell eligible student participants per major, the researchers were challenged with capturing the socioeconomic status of the study’s participants. The researchers determined that the best option was to allow students to self-identify within a section of an IRB-approved demographic form as a way to determine a student’s socioeconomic status. There was no way to confirm this information with the university. Each of the focus groups required clarification about what “Pell eligible” meant. Because the focus groups featured fifty-four students there was a plethora of information shared for the researchers to digest. Determining the themes of the data was not difficult, but it was challenging to determine what information was the most vital to the study.
PARTICIPANTS

After completion of the focus groups, a demographic chart (Appendix C) was created to assist the researchers in examining the profiles of participants. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity for this study. Of the fifty-four students who participated in the focus groups, 26% (n=14) reported completing an internship while enrolled at UM. Students represented seven of the ten academic colleges and schools at UM. There were also over 30 majors reported for participants in the study. Student participants identified with four different races: African American, African American/ Latino, Caucasian and Asian. Of the fourteen students who had participated in an internship while enrolled at UM, ten identified as African American females. Five of the ten women also identified as being Pell eligible. The sample size enhanced the confidence of the researchers in the findings. The range in academic college representation provided a sufficient perspective of the desired demographic.

While the perspectives of the fifty-four focus group participants were enlightening, the scholar-practitioners realized that interviewing students individually who participated in an internship while enrolled at UM would provide additional depth for the study. Eight students (Appendix D) participated in individual interviews with the scholar-practitioners. Four of the eight students also participated in the focus group sessions. Seven of the participants were classified as seniors. The majority of individual interview participants identified as African American. Five of the senior participants identified as female. Of the eight interview participants, four of the ten colleges and schools were represented. The same data collection process was
observed when conducting the interviews. Each scholar-practitioner shared in the facilitation responsibilities to make the most of the time allotted for participation. In relation to the analysis and reporting of results, each of the participants was assigned a pseudonym to protect the participants’ identities.
FOCUS GROUP THEMATIC REPORT

After analyzing the qualitative data that was collected, we began to look for trends and recurring ideas in the focus groups responses. Four common ideas emerged from the data collection: internship knowledge, university support, financial resources and personal networks. The focus group data collection featured fifty-four undergraduate students who were currently enrolled at UM. The students were contacted via email based on their participation in denoted university-approved groups to include but not limited to: BSU, CICCE, FastTrack, Lucky Day and Intercollegiate Athletics. Participants disclosed personal experiences with internships in addition to referencing knowledge about internship experiences of friends and family members. Several other topics were discussed but there was not enough frequency of the topic to warrant the title of a theme as related to this research topic. The sharing of specific student reflections was determined as the best method of describing the research findings revealed from over ten hours of data. The themes are not provided in any particular order because the researchers could not determine that one took precedence over another with the amount of time provided for initial research surrounding this problem of practice. The findings address both general internship discovery, as well as some evidence of disparity in experience based upon race and income.

Theme 1: Internship Knowledge

Focus group participants reported various levels of internship knowledge. We asked participants to describe whatever students know about internships at UM and responses included statements ranging from “I don’t know anything” to “Internships are a bridge to a job.”
Participants shared learning about internships from a variety of sources, but the most obvious and most consistent method of internship sharing is through university email. Satisfaction with the amount and types of internship communication also varied among participants. The researchers were surprised to learn that even with the amount of electronic communication occurring at UM, a prominent resource appreciated by students was bulletin board advertisements. One student in particular shared that he walks around his academic building when he has free time between classes to look at flyers. He noted that he decides what could be helpful for his time at UM based on his findings on the bulletin boards.

Another example of internship knowledge is consistent internship sharing from certain academic disciplines. For example, the School of Business Administration, School of Engineering and Meek School of Journalism were mentioned in having central internship resources and consistent electronic communication about potential internship opportunities. Sophomore International Studies major Jim shared his experience with internships at UM: “I mean mostly, when we see internships at UM, it's business related.” A junior Dietetics and Nutrition major stated that her professor mentioned the need to participate in an internship because of certification requirements. A sophomore majoring in IMC was aware of email solicitations with available business openings, but felt that it was left up to the student to pursue and engage the opportunity.

The final element to internship knowledge was student involvement in UM student organizations. Internship emails are sent from the following student organizations: Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement, Internship Experiences in the UM Division of Outreach, Student Alumni Council, IMAGE, National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers, McNair Scholars, Health Professions
Advising Office, LuckyDay, Black Student Union, MAPS, National Association of Black Accountants, and Black Law Student Association. Although students let us know that several organizations shared information about internship opportunities through a variety of methods, they recurrently mentioned needing a sense of investment in their academics and career to follow through with email communications and take action. Further, many student participants noted motivation is needed to pursue internship opportunities at UM. The researchers were also made aware that some instructors cover internships in the EDHE 105 course, but various perspectives emerged regarding the effectiveness of this coverage.

**Theme 2: University Support**

In focus group discussions patterns surfaced that internships are introduced to students in a variety of ways (especially during the freshman year), but there are limited resources at UM that provide details and guidance on how to access them as noted by Criminal Justice major Kara: “Basically, everything I did I, kind of did on my own.” She detailed writing letters and emails to secure an internship required for graduation. Kara went on to share that she sought out assistance from the Career Center and her academic department, but neither were helpful to her in finding internship employment. Her persistence paid off when she received an internship in Atlanta during the summer of 2017.

During analysis of focus group data, it was clear that a significant number of students struggled with where to go for assistance in obtaining an internship while enrolled at UM. In all focus groups, participants discussed a variety of resources at UM that either fostered or impeded internship participation. A lack of central resources to facilitate internship preparation was cited multiple times in every focus group. Respondents raised concerns about information shared that is sometimes inconsistent across academic disciplines and student organizations. Also impeding
internship participation, several respondents discussed some advisors being dismissive of exploratory conversations regarding internships and careers. Students asserted that UM does not promote internship opportunities, citing that internships are not discussed enough (especially with faculty and academic advisors) which causes confusion when seeking UM resources supportive of internships. Student participants overwhelmingly agreed that students do not know where to go for internship support and noted that they stumble upon opportunities at some point during their academic career. Some respondents also expressed concern for a lack of UM support to minority serving clubs and organizations, who are perceived as serving a vital role in getting minority students connected to career and internship opportunities.

After combining the focus group and interview participants, there were only one-third (eighteen out of fifty-four total students) who had participated in an internship at the time of this study. The scholar-practitioners were knowledgeable of the several academic programs that provided lists of local internship locations to students, but did little to provide intentional individual consultation. A Senior Exercise Science major who recently finished an academic advising meeting at the time of the focus groups shared that his advisor failed to discuss the necessities of the major’s required internship or practicum experience. The student knew that an internship was required to graduate with a degree in exercise science, but lacked the confidence to build a better relationship with faculty and support staff members in his department to learn more. Among all focus groups, participants lamented a lack of minority faculty and staff that look like them in their departments and noted most efforts to learn more about internship opportunities within their majors were unsuccessful.

There were some students who described positive experiences with faculty and staff at UM. Senior Philosophy major Paul shared a much different perspective of university support:
“well my freshman year I heard about internships from the career center and the emails that were sent about internships…But I think lots of students don't even look at their email, so we miss out on opportunities.” A few of the students who participated in both the focus groups and individual interviews believed that the students shared some responsibility in accessing internships. Review of the written transcripts during the analysis phase indicated that students who shared their involvement in multiple co-curricular clubs and organizations had a more positive experience learning about internship opportunities than students who did not seem to be as involved.

**Theme 3: Financial Challenges**

Financial challenges as barriers to internships were prominent themes that emerged in each focus groups. Respondents discussed a range of experiences that they felt hindered their ability to pursue internships. Examples of barriers to internships included, 1) a lack of financial resources to move outside of Oxford to pursue internship opportunities; 2) internships are often unpaid, and 3) scholarships to augment costs are few or non-existent at UM. While the participants unanimously referenced finances in a variety of ways, it was clear that whether they were accessing internships because of financial benefits or were unable to because of personal financial struggles, there was a shared concern amongst all participants surrounding how to finance internships.

In the same vein, it was evident that majority of participants understood the value that internships could provide, but the commitment that came along with the opportunity seemed daunting to both the students and their families. Kara, a senior criminal justice major, wanted to go to law school but shared that even in spite of her requirement to complete an internship to graduate, her mother did not want her to accept the position because it was “too far.” The student
eventually was forced to create a plan to support herself while on the unpaid internship through loans and a job prior to summer break at UM. Because her host site in Georgia was the only group who agreed to hire her despite numerous inquiries, she felt compelled to accept the position for fear of not being able to complete the required three hundred internship hours for graduation. About this dilemma she revealed: “For instance, me coming from a middle-class family who is currently struggling with financial issues, it was hard for me to go to Atlanta, find somewhere to stay, fend for myself, having to get gas all the time. It was really hard on my family, then at the same time my internship wasn't paid.”

The one resounding concern for the students involved in the study was that there was a financial commitment that must be made by the student, their families, and the host site. Senior Political Science Major, Brooke, illustrated how most students view their internship experiences: “...our internships are usually not in Oxford. So they want us to intern at the capital and go to D.C. and all these different things, and a lot of people can't afford it. Even though you can, I mean the school pays for some of it because you are a full-time student here taking classes, but you still have to pay for food, commuting, and clothes. Some people have to buy new clothes for those things. So, I think finances are a huge part of it.” The scholar-practitioners were aware of a few programs that offered financial support but there are no university programs that cover the additional costs of a student’s internship experience.

Even though there is a financial commitment that must be made on the part of the student, all fifty-eight participants were aware that participation in an internship could provide work experience which was needed to secure a job post-graduation. Sophomore exercise science major, Alex shared a perspective that was indicative of most students who attend college in 2018:
“If I can be honest, a lot of people seem to think that because you go to Ole Miss, once you graduate, boom, there's a job, and that's not the case. I know an engineering major who graduated three years ago and still doesn't have a job, works in a hotel in hospitality. Basically, he says the reason he cannot get a job is because they want someone with experience and he does not have the experience, and he always says that he wished he had of known that earlier, so he could have taken advantage of the internships and opportunities that were available for him.”

Of the eighteen students who had completed an internship, only four were required to participate in an internship to fulfill their degree requirements; the other fourteen students cited the reality that it is difficult to find a job without work experience.

**Theme 4: Personal Networks**

As this study was centered around the experiences of undergraduate African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, one of the emerging themes was the perceived inability to match the potential connections of majority peers in the UM environment. Across each focus group, respondents discussed a desire for mentorship or greater access to networking opportunities in which they would utilize learning about career pathways and resources. The need to engage with personal networks emerged from situations in which they felt that majority (Caucasian) students had better access to networks from family, family friends, and Greek (sorority and fraternity) organizations. Many stated that if they knew how to access networks with accomplished UM alumni, they would be more knowledgeable about internships and career opportunities. Although the researchers initially anticipated race would be a single theme in this study, students consistently cited that there were barriers relating to their social capital on campus when accessing internship opportunities.
While participants cited barriers regarding access, some students were optimistic about their ability to maneuver personal networks to achieve the end result of using their surroundings to gain access to similar opportunities as majority students. One student shared a unique perspective during one of the focus groups regarding personal responsibility in placement: “Student Alumni Council is specifically structured so that you can network.” The student believed that his participation in student groups placed him in spaces where he had access to alumni he would normally not have access to when considering his race and lack of membership in a fraternity: “you're set for life through the connection that you make through Alumni Council.” He also recognized the value in putting himself in spaces that were normally not perceived as comfortable for African Americans to achieve his networking goals: “going to the Grove on game day, so many internships and job offers happen in the Grove, but because of the atmosphere and culture, a lot of African Americans don't go to the Grove.” Regardless of their individual perspectives, positive or negative, students realized that their personal networks played a significant role in their experiences surrounding internships at UM. In contrast to the previous student who shared a positive experience with the UM Student Alumni Council, another student shared his frustration with the perception of a lack of opportunities for minorities:

…I think that sometimes, in certain fields that we try to intern with, there's a lack of representation of minority people, and then in that case we feel like we can't get those opportunities because they're not looking for us. I know that's a huge problem that I've seen, especially in Business.

The personal network theme was also evident when students discussed relationships or lack thereof with peers, faculty, and staff at UM. For example, several students talked about being either the only African American or one of a few in classroom settings. A public policy
major mentioned, “Nobody in Trent Lott looks like me” when referring to race. He continued to talk about the lack of racial/ethnic representation making him feel as though internship opportunities are not shared with him because he does not have someone looking out for him within his department. Another student shared a similar sentiment while discussing social capital at UM: “because we're not the majority, attention is just not paid to us. And I feel like we should have more attention, I mean I'm just being honest with you, mainly because we do lack resources and we do come from different backgrounds that probably didn't have the same resources as our other peers.” Focus group participants were aware of the benefits that came with internships, but some students still had not taken part, if it was not required by their department or if they were not encouraged by someone that they deemed invested in their success.

As outlined in chart 4 the focus group participants believed that internship knowledge, university support, financial resources, and personal networks impacted their abilities to engage in an internship while enrolled at UM. Because the focus groups covered such a wide range of participant profiles to include students enrolled in seven of the ten schools and colleges at UM, thirty-nine (72%) participants identified as being Pell eligible and students from all undergraduate classifications created a space for inquiry about the individual experiences of the students who actually participated in an internship. After review of the demographics of the focus groups it was revealed that only fourteen (26%) students had actually participated in an internship. The scholar- practitioners discussed the interest in what ideas would emerge if they interview student on an individual basis about their experience. This discussion was needed to enhance the student perspective surrounding how they view internships and potential barriers while enrolled at UM.
ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Following the analysis of focus group data, the scholar-practitioners determined that it was important to interview undergraduate students at UM that participated in an internship at the time of data collection. The opportunity to gain perspective from this demographic of student provided the ability to enhance the ideas shared by the focus group participants. The individual viewpoints were more detailed in the involvement and the exploration of what inhibited or enhanced their respective experiences. Of the fifty-four focus group participants, fourteen participated in an internship. This was determined by their notation of participation on the IRB approved demographic form. Four of the fourteen focus group students agreed to participate in individual interviews with the scholar-practitioners. Student-Athletes & participants in the Internship Experience were also were chosen to contribute based on their availability and involvement in an internship as confirmed by the IRB approved demographic form. Both Phillips and Saxon conducted one-on-one student interviews with their respective UM issued notebook computers in their respective offices in the Jackson Avenue Center and the FedEx Student-Athlete Success Center. Once the interviews were complete Phillips was responsible for completing the transcriptions through Rev.com and Saxon was responsible for the coding and updating of transcriptions. There were eight students interviewed based on the criteria previously mentioned. An additional set of questions were created and approved by IRB to use for the individual interviews. The scholar-practitioners believed that due to the limited size of interviews
(nine), participant profiles would be vital in providing perspective regarding the themes that emerged from the sessions.

**James.** James was a Senior Management major with a Marketing minor in the School of Business. He identified as an African American male as well as a student-athlete. When discussing his internship experience he shared that he did not expect to actually take on substantial tasks at his site: “honestly I thought I would just be learning.” ‘I didn't know that it would be as in-depth as it was.’” James shared his appreciation for his supervisors and their willingness to teach him what his life would be like in his area of career interest. By the end of his internship, he had completed a feasibility study for a new client with whom the company was working. He believed that he would return to the internship site if given the opportunity.

**Meredith.** Meredith was a senior Exercise Science major who identified as an African American female and student-athlete. While she was majoring in Exercise Science at UM, her ultimate goal was to become a registered nurse (RN). She was unable to major in nursing at UM because of the demand of Intercollegiate Athletics on her schedule. At the time of the interview, she was applying to Nursing School to reach her goal of being an RN.

Her internship site was her first experience in the nursing area. Due to privacy concerns and her classification as an Exercise Science major she was not able to have as much hands-on experience as she’d hoped: “...I knew that it would be more of a learning atmosphere instead of hands-on because I was not a nursing student at UM.” After being prompted by the facilitator, Meredith noted that she was able to have more of a shadow experience when a visiting dentist came to her site. She was able to assist him in setup and patient management. Overall, she was pleased with her internship experience because it exposed her to the career she sought in spite of not being able to major in nursing as an undergraduate student at UM.
Jesse. Jesse was a Senior Forensic Science major in the College of Liberal Arts. She identified as a Caucasian female student-athlete. Jesse’s internship was held in Alabama during the summer of 2017. Jesse was required to complete an internship to meet her major’s graduation requirement at UM. While Jesse did not identify with any of the researchers desired demographics it was vital to the researchers to understand what her experience was like. She encountered similar barriers as minority students, such as a lack of support from her academic department, when working to obtain an internship. Jesse explained that it was difficult to find a place to intern in the Oxford area and she did not receive guidance from her professors: “I desperately went to my department head and he knew the head of the forensics department in Alabama. He emailed my information which ultimately lead to me getting the job.” Jesse also shared an interesting perspective on finances while participating in her unpaid internship: “It was an unpaid internship, so I had a lot of finagling to do. So, I had to find a place to stay in Birmingham while subleasing my place so I had enough money to live. It was the only way for me to survive there. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to go.”

Patience. Patience identified as an African American female majoring in Journalism. She was a Senior in the Meek School of Journalism & New Media. Patience completed a Media internship during the summer of 2017. She was excited about working for the media company writing content but ran into some issues with how her race played a role in her experience. During her interview she detailed how much of a culture shock it was to work in this company in spite of attending UM which is a predominately white institution (PWI), because she felt like she did not fit in. She recalled: “I never worked in a place where I am the only person.’ ‘It did make me feel uncomfortable sometimes.’” Her interaction with her editor, who was a Caucasian woman, proved to be disheartening at times because of the editor’s response to stories she
wanted to contribute: “I remember there was this positive story about a Black father and his son I wanted to write. My White editor was like, oh, I don't think that will do well.’ ‘I'm just like, every time I want to do a story about a Black person, it has to be bad. Why does it have to be a negative? So, I did think about race a lot when I was in my internship. I feel like it did play a role in some things.”

Although Patience felt aware of how race played a role in her experience, she was able to learn about the type of work environment where she would excel because of the internship. Furthermore, she was able to see how she became more self-aware due to her time with the media company.

**Brooke.** Brooke was a Senior Political Science Major at UM. She identified as an African American female who aspires to be a lawyer for a nonprofit agency. She previously interned at the Mississippi Center for Justice following her freshman year at UM. Brooke has been proactive about what opportunities she pursued during her matriculation. While she acknowledged that most of her peers would like to be lobbyists and politicians, she would like to further her education by attending law school. Brooke also shared that the use of her personal network assisted her in gaining access to this opportunity.

“So she, basically, let me send my resume in and she gave it to her boss. Her boss Skyped me for an interview that lasted like two hours, very long. I was so nervous and so that's how I ended up getting the internship. I was the youngest person there. My connections helped me get the job.” Brooke’s willingness to engage her family members wife regarding a position aided her in getting and opportunity with the Mississippi Center for Justice. She has worked with the center since her freshman year. Brooke knows that the consistency of her work will positively impact her law school application.
**Nyla.** Nyla was a Senior African American Female majoring in Criminal Justice at UM. She interned with one of the Mississippi District Attorneys’ to get experience to benefit her Law School application and satisfy the requirements for graduation. Being transparent, Nyla recognized that she waited until later to apply for an internship. Her mother reached out to a police officer who connected Nyla with a District Attorney in Mississippi that was located twenty-five minutes from her home. Nyla completed her internship over the Christmas break so she could be on track for graduation in May. She detailed how the police officer served as an advocate for her: “I think she should just go to the District Attorney's office. So, he put in a good word for me, like never talked to him before, but he put in a good word for me and I just began over Christmas break.” One of her unique reflections was how her academic program prepared her for understanding her internship. Nyla remembered how excited she was when she understood terms used in court that she learned in class: “there's some things that I would have been unaware of, some conversations I would have been unable to engage in because I didn't understand the terminology or how the legal system works as a whole.” After leaving her internship she made a point to get all of the contact information for her supervisors and discuss her law school application. As a result of Nyla’s involvement in the internship she was extremely confident in her preparation and new network.

**Lena.** Lena was a Senior who identified as an African American female double majoring in Integrated Marketing and Communications (IMC) and Economics. She completed a Marketing Internship in Georgia during the summer of 2017. Lena was candid about how she changed majors after arriving at UM and even shared how a mistake by her advisor landed her in IMC. It was intriguing that Lena recognized that she wanted to be challenged and Economics was the perfect major to add to her interests. It was clear that Lena knew what she wanted and
how to achieve her goals. She did not credit anyone in particular for her success, but she did realize that her willingness to invest in herself steered her career plan. Lena had a unique perspective on how she promoted herself: “I’ve always been a self-starter.’ ‘Social media and the internet has a way of putting ideas out there into people’s heads.’ ‘Like, ”Oh, they’re doing an internship, maybe let me look into that.’ ‘That would be fun to do, or just to gain experience, to see what works.’”

Interviewing Lena provided a different perspective of how prepared and motivated the study participants were. She referenced an unconventional way of receiving her internship through social media and being able to provide examples of her YouTube work she had created in class at UM.

**Kendall.** Kendall was a Management Information Systems (MIS) major. He identified as an African American male who wants to work with companies to aid them in organizing their information systems. Kendall spoke highly of how his program has prepared him to work in this area moving forward. His motive for seeking an internship was based on an interest in being in a different environment, saying: “well, to be really, really honest on internships, I always wanted to leave Mississippi.” Kendall applied for an internship in Washington, D.C. at the encouragement of his work-study supervisors who served as positive role models while he has been at UM. His work study experience had exposed him to a professional work environment but he did cite that his preparation in the Internship Experience program prepared him for the environment he entered in Washington, D.C.

Kendall also shared how difficult it became to manage his ability to live in Washington, D.C. with the little financial support he had. He was appreciative for the two thousand dollars he received from the Internship Experience program but that was not sufficient for his time in the
city: “You all offered me two thousand dollars so, that was a plus. My mom saved up some money and I used that to buy my ticket to Washington and I borrowed some money from my aunt, then repaid her in the fall with my refund.” Kendall also shared how a conversation with his internship supervisor got him a five-hundred-dollar stipend to ensure he had money to live while interning. His persistence benefited him in the end but he was aware that his personal network and financial assistance played a major role in his ability to take advantage of this opportunity.

After analyzing the eight individual interviews the scholar-practitioners were able to determine that similar ideas continued to emerge. Students believed that internship knowledge, university support, financial resources and personal networks (Chart 6) impacted their internship experiences whether positive or negative. The student participants gained their internships through a variety of methods to include personal networks and university support. While the Training Program and Internship Experience were instrumental in the students’ ability to access opportunities, some students did not have the same chance because they did not know about the university support that was available. Financial support continued to be discussed in the individual interviews. Two of the nine participants were provided a stipend for living expenses and able to complete their internship in Oxford where they already had a place to live. The other seven students struggled to make ends meet because of the locations of their internships. Consistently there was a lack of knowledge about internships and what to expect amongst students. While they knew they needed experience they lacked knowledge in what was next and how to start the process. The reemphasis of the themes encouraged the scholar-practitioners and continued the conversation about potential studies in this area moving forward.
FINAL ANALYSIS

The focus groups and individual interviews yielded significant perspectives of undergraduate students at UM regarding access to internships. Even though the two data collection methods were different they both revealed similar themes during analysis. The researchers believe that sharing the student perspectives are vital for creating recommendations that would resonate with UM administration, faculty and staff. Resounding sentiments throughout the focus group and interview discussions was that African American students perceive that they do not have a voice at UM, and their concerns often go unnoticed. Participants were hopeful that their feedback in this study would be helpful to future minority students seeking internship opportunities at UM. The scholar-practitioners think that because undergraduate African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds experience unique barriers when attempting to access internships while enrolled at UM; the university has the ability to address some of the concerns shared by understanding what internship services and resources are actually offered at the university. One interesting point during data collection was that out of the nine Exercise Science students who were interviewed, eight of them identifying as African Americans, reported not having any guidance in how to obtain their mandated practicum or internship at UM. The one Caucasian Exercise Science major reported a much different experience. She shared that her professors and advisor were extremely proactive in assisting her in obtaining an internship. While she believed that her major was supportive in her quest to find an internship; she shared how being a first-generation student and
Pell Grant recipient impacted her drive: “I do feel like I have to work twice as hard as everybody else, people ask me, why do you worry about your grades so much?’ ‘I was like, because this is my one chance.’ ‘If I blow it, I blow it.’” This example is indicative of a lack of consistency amongst UM academic departments in how students are assisted in accessing their respective internship opportunities.

All of the focus groups referenced how the School of Business engages their students to begin the internship search process. Race was not identified by the researchers as an independent theme, but it had influence within each of the ideas identified by the researchers. For example, students in each focus group mentioned perceptions of majority students learning about internships sooner, generally having greater support through existing networks such as Greek life and family, greater access to financial resources, and better established personal networks. An African American Senior shared how her mother’s job provided access to information that does not always make it to her as a student at UM: “… she's really connected to people in the university, sometimes she will forward me emails.’ ‘I'm kind of thankful that I have that connection because my mom wants to see me do well regardless, so I always know that if there's something that I might not have gotten from a department…”

The third manuscript revisits the findings of our study while outlining recommendations for UM administrators, faculty and staff on how to enhance support for undergraduate African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds when accessing internships at UM.
LIST OF REFERENCES
References


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP TIMELINE
Appendix A

Focus Group Timeline

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## Appendix B

### Individual Interview Timeline

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APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS
Appendix C
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Appendix D

Individual Interview Demographics

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MANUSCRIPT 3: IMPLEMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION PLAN
SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

This study sought to determine and increase internship participation for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds at the University of Mississippi (UM) through reflections of student knowledge of internships and internship resources as well as perceptions of experiences from students who had completed an internship. Jennifer Saxon and Kristina Phillips, the researchers driving this study, are both involved with internship programs at the University of Mississippi, so the project aims to address some ongoing concerns regarding African American internship participation and participation of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The following research questions were developed in hopes of improving internship efforts at the University of Mississippi: (1) How can faculty and staff at the University of Mississippi improve collaborative efforts and resources regarding internships? (2) Which existing internship efforts can be enhanced or duplicated to promote increased participation? (3) How do we make a compelling argument to the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to collaborate on improving access to internships? A fourth question?

Experiential learning theory, which was central to our conceptual framework, suggests that experience is critical to the learning process and knowledge is “created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb 1984, p. 41). Experiential learning theory helped in understanding how students relate to work experiences gained outside of the classroom, such as experience in the form of internships. For students to successfully navigate Kolb’s experiential learning model, they need to move through a cycle of four phases, including: concrete
experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). The broad intent of the research was to explore internship participation for African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The study’s findings did not fully examine completion of an experiential learning cycle, but motivation was found by the researchers to aim for enhanced accessibility to hands-on experiences, like internships, needed to initiate Kolb’s cycle. Future studies may need to focus on the experiential learning theory as it relates to students of color and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The theory should be expanded to consider additional steps for diverse student groups to follow to participate in experiential learning opportunities, such as internships. The study’s focus group and interview data revealed that UM students who have participated in internships have not consistently understood or engaged in the developmental benefits of experiential learning theory nor have they fully engaged in high-impact internships as defined by the Association of American Colleges &Universities (AAC&U).

Qualitative data was collected from focus groups, individual interviews, and analysis of documents from academic programs and websites. Before gathering qualitative data, quantitative data from the University of Mississippi’s Office of Institutional Research and Effective Planning (IREP) was reviewed to examine enrollment patterns of internship courses for both African American students and those receiving federal Pell grants. The quantitative data showed that African American enrollment in internship courses mirrors overall African American enrollment at the University, which inspired an exploration of students’ personal perspectives about internships and access to internship resources at the University to better understand the experiences of students in these populations who have completed internships. Methods of internship knowledge dissemination, including how different offices of academic and student
affairs at UM share internship resources, and some barriers students perceived as prohibitive to internship participation were examined during qualitative data collection.

All participants in this study were undergraduate students from the University of Mississippi, a four-year predominately White institution (commonly referred to as PWIs) with the highest research designation (R1) given by the Carnegie classification system. The University of Mississippi is located in the southeastern region of the United States and has a history of racial inequity, but is presently committed to promoting an inclusive environment (University of Mississippi Diversity Plan, 2016). Study participants were recruited from the Black Student Union (BSU), LuckyDay Residential College, Ole Miss Opportunity scholarship recipients, Increasing Minority Access to Graduate Education (IMAGE) scholars, FasTrack, Associated Student Body members, intercollegiate athletics, and members of predominately African American sororities. Participants were from a variety of academic disciplines and recruited through word-of-mouth referrals and email solicitations with permission from the advisors of the aforementioned student organizations. Fifty-four students participated in focus groups for this study. Eight students participated in individual interviews. Fourteen students (26%) from our focus group sample self-identified as having participated in an internship, and 39 (72%) self-identified as eligible for federal Pell grants.
SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Qualitative findings revealed that UM students have a myriad of perceptions of internships and gain knowledge of internship resources from a multitude of UM resources. Knowledge of internships and resources ranged from very little information to specific names of UM faculty and staff who intentionally shared information, showing that the frequency, nature, and quality of internship dissemination seems to vary depending on academic discipline. Generally speaking, students from pre-professional programs, such as business and engineering, recognized several internship opportunities promoted by staff in their academic disciplines, while students from liberal arts and humanities disciplines could not as readily identify such opportunities. The four themes that emerged from our ten-focus group conducted with students were (1) internship knowledge, (2) university support, (3) financial challenges, (4) and personal networks.

Theme 1: Internship knowledge

The majority of internship knowledge highlighted in our focus group discussions were emails sent from faculty and staff in academic departments. Specific departments mentioned were the UM Career Center, School of Journalism, School of Business, Nutrition and Hospitality Management, and Political Science. Students in our focus groups expressed appreciative feelings for resources on our campus, especially faculty and staff that are proactive and consistent in sharing information about internships. Jacqueline Certion from FasTrack and Toni Avant in the UM Career Center were names of staff that were referenced multiple times for sharing internship
resources. Students seem to appreciate consistent electronic notifications, such as e-mail, and face-to-face conversations about internships and internship resources.

As one student stated “you don’t know what you don’t know” when speaking about her experience of being a first-generation African American student. She talked about becoming overwhelmed once learning about internship opportunities. She felt behind after she discovered the potential positive impact an internship could have on her academic and professional career. Some students expressed gratitude for faculty who shared internship information in lecture courses and academic advising appointments. One student mentioned an example that she considered particularly innovative and effective. This junior year dietetics and nutrition major in the School of Applied Sciences, London, a pseudonym, shared that her department sends weekly newsletters regarding internships and regularly updates a Blackboard page with internship resources for majors. Such resources point students in this major to a specific location for information about potential internships and provides some assistance with the internship search.

Another student in the focus group discussion who was enrolled in the School of Engineering disclosed access to a specific staff member dedicated to searching for internship opportunities. The same student spoke of the effectiveness of bulletin boards for advertising internship opportunities. These positive experiences lead us to believe that African American students and students of low socioeconomic status would benefit from having consistent access to a reference point for internship resources, whether this reference point is in the form of an email, staff person, or Blackboard portal. Faculty and staff from all academic disciplines at UM should make consistent efforts in providing consistent resource sharing so students are knowledgeable about how to find internships.
Theme 2: University Support

Some students are dissatisfied and feel disconnected from career opportunities offered by UM because shared resources for internships do not seem to be an institutional priority. This theme explores concerns students voiced when asked to describe resources at UM that help with securing internships. One student described frustration when asking for support while searching for internships. She eventually found resources on her own after a failed search for help. She described her experience:

I went to the Career Center, asking them is there any website that secures me an internship or allows me to put my resume out there. They informed me about LinkedIn. Honestly, it really wasn't helpful. Basically, everything I did, I kind of did on my own.

Frustration emerged in several of the focus group discussions because students did not understand or identify a resource central for internship support. Because students cannot identify consistent resources for internship support, they associate the institution’s lack of internship guidance with a lack of value. The students’ frustrations are amplified when discussing post-baccalaureate employment since some students also perceive work experience as a necessity for job attainment. Making internship opportunities more visible and providing details about obtaining internships were mentioned throughout focus groups as a way to enhance UM’s internship resources. These student suggestions imply that it is critical for the institution to provide some consistency when sharing internship opportunities to actively promote experiential opportunities so students can make connections between academics, real-world problems, and employment.
Theme 3: Financial resources

Students talked about finances in four different ways: needing internships to secure full-time employment, lack of financial resources for relocation, unpaid internships, and lack of scholarships and grants to augment costs for internships. First, students talked about needing internships to improve their chances of getting a job after graduating from UM. When asked what they know about internships, a common response involved the need for experience to enhance the likelihood of getting a job immediately after graduation. Even STEM majors, who are commonly perceived to have better career opportunities after graduation, stated that internships make a difference with salary offers in entry level positions. One STEM major stated:

I could go into a company now and be making the entry level salary that another person who just graduated could make during an internship, but by the time I graduate and when I get out, if you intern with a company so much, you could be making more than the person who didn't do an internship…”

Another aspect of financial concern expressed by students is that they mostly had preference for paid internships but recognized that most experiences are unpaid. Because students know that a lot of internships come without compensation, they talked about the University of Mississippi’s geographical location being restrictive for temporary relocation for internships that are unpaid and hosted in larger metropolitan areas. One student specifically stated that “Mississippi is a hindrance” because she feels there are no jobs in her field, Integrated Marketing Communications, in the State.

The AAC&U suggest in their 2010 article, Reducing Internship Inequity, that it is difficult for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to decide to pursue unpaid
internships because of factors such as rising tuition fees, government spending cuts to state financial aid, and student loan debt. These factors can contribute to low college completion rates for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Mayo & Shethji, 2010). Contrarily, students with more affluent backgrounds with high-income earning parents and parents with high levels of educational attainment are eight times more likely to complete their undergraduate studies than those from more disadvantaged households (Edwards and Hertel-Fernandez 2010, 1).

Because internships and college expenses, in general, are high, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have considerable disadvantages when seeking employment opportunities.

**Theme 4: Personal Networks**

Focus group participants conveyed mixed feelings about the role race plays in learning about internship opportunities and securing them. First, students noted the frequency of being a visible minority in classroom situations. Some students specifically pointed to being one of one of just two or three African Americans in classroom. One student stated: “…being the only one, like once you do get there as the intern, because for me, when I’m the only person around, or the only black person, I feel a little bit uncomfortable.”

Some students also attributed their family and socioeconomic backgrounds to knowing about internships. One student noted that her high school was predominately Caucasian, and internships were a topic of conversation prior to enrolling at UM. Her friends from predominately African American schools, however, were not made aware of such opportunities unless involved in programs where invitation for involvement were based on high academic achievement.

Competition and drive was another recurring topic among focus groups. Some participants noted that African American students discount their qualifications for pursuing
internships either because they do not think they are competitive, or there are limited internship positions available for African American students to meet racial/ethnicity “quotas.” Positive feelings were attributed to resources such as the Career Center, FasTrack, EDHE 105, and minority-serving student organizations and specific academic advisors that assist with internship information sharing.

Individual interviews of students were conducted with some of the students who indicated they completed internships on the demographic forms. The words of these interview participants were analyzed with the AAC&U’s eight criterion for evidence of high-impact student engagement. George Kuh’s 2008 report, High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter, was published as an AAC&U Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative. In his report, Kuh included six elements that make experiences high-impact. According to Kuh, high-impact practices are effortful, build substantive relationships, engage across differences (diversity), provide rich feedback, apply and test knowledge, and provide reflection. Kuh’s six elements were expanded to eight in 2013, adding high performance expectations and public display of competence. We decided to incorporate the AAC&U’s standards of high-impact practice in one portion of the data analysis because the organization essentially devised the term “high-impact practice”, developed standards for effective high-impact implementation, and is a national leader in high-impact practice research. The following section provides detail for each element of high-impact practices and details discuss of evidence or lack of evidence from the study for each element.

**Investment of Time and Effort**

Students should dedicate substantial energy and time to meaningful work-related assignments and have some level of autonomy in decision-making to indicate investment in work
at the internship (Kuh, O’Donnell & Reed, 2013). Internship time and effort seemed to vary between the eight participants with whom we conducted individual interviews. Three students acquired internships outside of the State of Mississippi, which required substantial travel commitments, while the remaining five students interviewed had internships within Mississippi. When describing his internship, Kendall, who interned in Washington, D.C., talked about working more than 40 hours per week during peak times of his internship. None of the other students mentioned any additional time commitments. All interview participants spoke about meaningful work tasks that directly related to their intended career paths.

**Quality Relationships with Faculty and Peers**

High-impact internships should help students cultivate substantive relationships with others and provide opportunities to interact with those invested in the students’ success (Kuh, 2008). Only one student mentioned a UM faculty member being supportive during her internship acquisition and experience in Washington, DC. Patience mentioned a professor in the School of Journalism who helped review her application materials and resume prior to submitting her internship applications. Students mostly mentioned family and UM staff when asked what resources helped them throughout their internship, but none of the interviewees specifically mentioned consistent and meaningful interaction with faculty and peers during their internship.

**Experience with Diversity**

Involvement with diversity by interacting with those with substantial differences (on the bases of ability, racial, geographical, economical, etc…) challenge students to think critically, especially when contact with diversity is a novel experience (Kuh, 2008). In her interview, Patience talked about being the only African American at her internship site. She said, “I think one thing I really worried about on my internship this past summer, I was one of the only ones,
and not only was I the only one, but the other girl (intern) I felt was more polished than me… Because I'm an African-American woman that wears my hair natural, so I worry about stuff like that, too. Like, just how I come off.” She also talked about being self-conscious of her work because stories she had written highlighting positive African American experiences were not the type of content the media company for whom she worked found appealing.

**Solve Real-World Problems**

The majority of interview participants mentioned having meaningful work during their internships. James mentioned in his interview that he expected doing “dirty work” such as carrying boxes, fetching coffee and making copies, but was surprised once he got to his internship and was asked to fulfill duties of a typical entry level employee. James’ experience speaks to the types of expectations needed for a high-impact practice in addition to the reality of having substantive work in the field. He attributed his low expectations of internship work to previous exposure to movies and television. Kendall mentioned being the only person at his internship able to navigate and use data, so he also had had meaningful work experience. He also reflected on encountering some unskilled tasks, such as making deliveries in a U-Haul van for his supervisors.

**Frequent, Timely, and Constructive Feedback**

In his 2008 AAC&U publication, Kuh shared that students should have their performances regularly assessed by supervisors, both formally and informally. Not one of the students interviewed discussed consistent evaluation taking place during or after their internships. Kendall mentioned being reprimanded a couple of times during his internship. He did not mention any specific feedback from his internship instructor of record. Patience did not enroll in a course for internship credit to avoid tuition costs, so she did not receive consistent
feedback from a faculty member. She does talk about feedback on an article she wrote for her internship site that was deemed unacceptable by her supervisor, but there was no indication of consistent, constructive feedback.

**Reflection**

Students should have awareness of their values and beliefs during a high-impact practice because it helps them to put their involvement and experiences into personal perspective (Kuh, 2008). Kendall mentioned reflecting on his experiences and appreciating his time in Washington, D.C. He also talked about his personal belief of making every experience into a positive one by learning from them. None of the interviewees talked about purposeful reflection during or immediately after their internships.

**High Expectations**

After reviewing transcripts for the individual interviews with previous internship participants, only two of the eight students interviewed talked about having high expectations prior to their internships. Both of the students who expressed having high expectations in anticipation of their placement were disappointed because their direct internship supervisors did not provide enough detailed information about internship responsibilities. Kendall, for example, shared that his experience seemed to lack high expectations and his internship supervisor only looked for him to follow basic rules like showing up to work on time.

**Public Demonstration of Competence**

Examples of public demonstration of competence include capstone projects, presentations, or narrative evaluation evaluated by a faculty member (Kuh, O’Donnell & Reed, 2013). Because some of the interviewees did not get course credit for their internship, we know that they were not evaluated by UM faculty for their experience. None of the eight interviewees
discussed publicly sharing their experience after their internship with peers, UM staff, or faculty. Kendall was a participant of the UM Internship Experience, but was not chosen to demonstrate his knowledge or skills gained through his internship at the program’s annual presentation and reception.

Overall, student interviews with those who completed internships did not consistently demonstrate the eight qualities needed to be considered a high-impact practice. Although the interview questions were not initially designed specifically with high-impact practices integrated within each question, we expected student feedback to exhibit qualities of high-impact practices when asked participants to describe their internship experiences. For this reason, it cannot be distinguished that the internships described by the participants in this study rise to the level of high-impact practices as defined by the AAC&U. Further studies should examine the quality of internships to ensure high-impact practice qualities are intentionally integrated within curricular plans (syllabi) and supervision.

Student feedback from the focus groups and interviews conducted in this study illuminated inconsistencies in internship resources and internship information shared to students. Because the study focused on student perspectives of internships and internship resources at UM, suggestions were developed to improve collaborative efforts and resources regarding internships. Collaboration is a critical element to identifying which existing internship efforts can be enhanced or duplicated to increase internship participation. By acknowledging the necessity for collaborative efforts among faculty, staff, and administrators to inform students of internship opportunities, the UM community could move forward in providing more equitable internship resources. Previous assumptions that information about internships at UM is inconsistent and sometimes confusing for students is justified because the focus group and interview participants
collectively included students enrolled in seven of the ten academic schools and colleges serving undergraduates representing 30 separate majors. Providing more consistent information should commence with conversation initiated by the University community (faculty, staff, and administrators) to clarify the experiences considered to be internships and to design them as a high-impact practice as defined by the AAC&U. This definition and design should be shared and adopted between all academic schools and colleges. Courses for academic internship credit include wording in their titles such as “field study,” “practicum,” “co-op,” and “internships.” In addition, students have access to internships without enrolling in courses with any of these designations. For example, some UM students, as our interview summary illuminated, complete internships without enrolling in a course to avoid additional tuition costs. It is unclear how the University should account for and assess such “unofficial” or non-academic internship activity. Conversations about identifying internship activity in a uniform manner is critical for ongoing collaboration. Creating community and finding partners to facilitate regular dialogue encompassing internship best practices will clarify which existing activities are high-impact, effective, and worth duplicating.

Until internship activity is fully understood from student, faculty, and staff perspectives, internships cannot be considered as a high-impact practice at UM. The AAC&U suggests that within any given type of high-impact practice, such as internships, quality and student impact can vary depending on the method of implementation and variations in design (Kuh, O’Donnell & Reed, 2013). Because there are some quality internship practices occurring at UM, its community should make existing internship practices more consistent, visible, credit-bearing, and funded, which should then result in increased feelings of legitimacy towards internships from all involved student, staff, and faculty stakeholders (Kuh, O’Donnell & Reed, 2013). These
suggested actions for improving internship access and resources at UM are not expensive to implement. This case study emphasizes the need for UM internship stakeholders to intentionally collaborate in providing consistent and inclusive internship resources for UM’s diverse student population.

Because collaboration is central to this charge for the UM Community, a compelling argument is needed for the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to improve access to internships. UM’s most recent strategic plan has already made this argument to the UM community for us. The academic excellence pillar of UM’s “Flagship Forward,” strategic plan was published in December 2017 and includes a goal of enhancing the quality of academic programs (UM Strategic Plan, 2017). The first goal of the pillar specifies that UM will “integrate meaningful, experiential learning opportunities into undergraduate, professional, and graduate academic programs to attract talented, diverse students and to prepare them for careers as lifelong learners and engaged citizens.” (UM Strategic Plan, 2017, p.22). The action step directed towards undergraduates intends for UM to foster an environment conducive to integrating experiential learning in all academic programs. The University of Mississippi plans to measure experiential learning activity by assessing the number of faculty, students, and academic programs involved in experiential learning activities. This study serves a critical piece of the academic excellence action plan by offering perspectives to strengthen and expand experiential education offerings, specifically in the form of internships.

All UM students need advocating for being exposed to internships to adequately prepare them to research and secure an internship before degree completion; however, African American students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds need additional support to ensure equity in internship practice and implementation as evidenced in our focus group and interview
discussions. Students in this study perceive inequitable internship access on the bases of race, socioeconomic status, and academic discipline. Participants overwhelmingly believe Caucasian students have advantages in career preparation opportunities such as networking and exposure to career resources, both from UM and personal sources. UM’s local student perspective on internships is interestingly supported by a recent national study that sheds light on intergenerational wealth. The 2018 study suggested that male children of wealthy African Americans are more likely to grow up poor than Caucasian males beginning with the same socioeconomic background (Chetty, Hendren, Jones & Porter, 2018). Racial disparities and the lack of economic mobility for African Americans has been a consistent concern of American society (Chetty et al., 2018), so it is noteworthy that the perspectives of UM students reflect national trends.

Students in this study recognized that pre-professional programs such as business and engineering have established career preparation programming and support. The School of Engineering has a staff person, as reported by a study participant enrolled in an engineering program, dedicated to finding internship and co-op opportunities for students enrolled in academic programs. The School of Business has a coordinator of career preparation and internships within an Office of Undergraduate Career Preparation and an on-line database for internships and career resources exclusively accessible to business majors. Coincidentally, enrollment figures show that African American students are not substantially enrolled in these two academic programs, as demonstrated in Appendices A and B. The College of Liberal Arts and School of Applied Sciences, who have considerably higher African American student enrollment, do not have such centralized resources. Because students perceive that certain academic disciplines at UM are better supported with internship opportunities than others, their
feedback can be a tool for awareness in regards to inequitable internship experiences in relation to academic discipline. Awareness alone is not enough; the university community must take action to reverse student perception of internship inequity at UM to ensure that experiential education opportunities are available and accessible for the institution’s diverse student population.
IMPROVING PRACTICE TO ENHANCE EQUITY, ETHICS, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Internship participation at the University of Mississippi, which can potentially improve post-graduate outcomes such as gaining full-time employment or enrolling in graduate school soon after baccalaureate completion, can be enhanced by these recommended actions: (a) promote internship participation at the institutional level, (b) provide targeted internship resources and information sharing to student organizations serving African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and (c) identify pathways for internship participation within each academic unit.

Institutional Internship Promotion

Promoting internship participation at the institutional level requires an investment of resources, both temporal and financial, from several University of Mississippi stakeholders to ensure the campus climate fosters a supportive environment for internship participants, providers, and liaisons. Because internship resources are decentralized at the University of Mississippi, we find it necessary to first assess the quality of courses and resources offered. The inception of an internship network is recommended and should be inclusive of faculty and staff with prior involvement with leading internship courses for academic credit or programs supporting internship participation on our campus. The internship network will examine best practices from organizations, such as the National Society of Experiential Education (NSEE), the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the Association of American Colleges
and Universities (AAC&U), and peer institutions with similar internship access and equity challenges to develop some recommended learning objectives for University of Mississippi internship courses. Several focus group participants mentioned concerns over the varying quality of internship resources and courses among academic departments, so we contend that an internship network will address student concern for quality and consistent internship support. The promotion of internship participation at the institutional level by implementing an internship network for faculty and staff also addresses one project goal of improving collaborative efforts regarding internships at the University of Mississippi.

The next step to promoting internship participation at the institutional level is to incorporate internship resources into existing large-scale campus initiatives, such as EDHE 105: The Freshman Year Experience; living learning communities, such as FasTrack and Luckyday Residential College; and recipients of financial need-based programs, such as the Ole Miss Opportunity scholarships. Some focus group participants noted that because they learned of the importance of internships too late in their academic degree programs, they were unable to adequately prepare for the time and/or financial commitment of completing an internship. Approximately 75% of freshman were enrolled in EDHE 105 in Fall 2017, according to the program’s website, so the recommendation to incorporate internship resources into this course would expose a large number of University of Mississippi students to the availability of internship resources early in their academic career. FasTrack, LuckyDay, and Ole Miss Opportunity Scholarship participants are already required to enroll in EDHE 105, so specific internship workshops (an inexpensive recommendation) could be implemented to reinforce the benefits of internship participation.
Several students who participated in this study were vocal about a lack of minority mentors and networking opportunities for African American students. For example, focus group participants perceived that the majority student population (Caucasian students) had ample opportunities to network with family and family friends prior to enrolling at the University of Mississippi, giving them an advantage when searching for and securing internships or full-time employment. Student participants mentioned multiple times throughout the study that Caucasian peers credited networking opportunities to members of their desired profession while in class or when asked how they acquired certain professional opportunities, such as internships. Because there is a difference in availability of internship resources and networking opportunities (both formal and informal), the creation of a database of African American graduates is proposed and should allow current students of the University of Mississippi to connect with African American alumni. Such a database will help to consistently nurture the University’s relationship with African American alumni in addition to connecting current students with alumni who can assist students navigate professional settings. This project would need to be collaborative in nature, involving the University of Mississippi Division of Outreach, Alumni Association, and Career Center.

A final strategy to support the institutionalization of internship resources is to increase financial support and visibility for the University of Mississippi Career Center. The University of Mississippi has the smallest Career Center of any school in the Southeastern Conference, (Avant, 2016). There are only eight full-time staff members in the UM Career Center, while Mississippi State University, an in-state institution with similar enrollment to the University of Mississippi has twelve full-time employees, and Louisiana State University has nineteen (Avant, 2016; Mississippi State University Career Center, n.d.; Olinde LSU Career Center, n.d.). Providing
more resources to the Career Center will help it function as a central resource for internship resources, which currently employees a single graduate assistant to research internship opportunities for every academic discipline at the University of Mississippi (Avant, 2016). It is physically impossible for one graduate student to fulfill internship needs for the entire University of Mississippi student population, so it is critical to get the UM Career Center more support to fulfill its mission “to collaborate with the university community to provide services, resources, and professional networking opportunities” (University of Mississippi Career Center, n.d.).

**Targeted Internship Resources**

Because students observed inconsistent and inequitable information shared about internships, the University should provide resources in the form of workshops and marketing campaigns targeted to students in organizations serving African American students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Student organizations such as the Black Student Union (BSU), Men of Excellence (MOX), and Increasing Minority Access to Graduate Education (IMAGE), have a large reach within the African American student population, so workshops targeted towards their members will enhance internship awareness among these student groups. Focus group participants repeatedly stated that a barrier of accessing internships is simply knowing where to go and who to contact for internship resources. Academic departments should also share internship resources through existing electronic platforms to further support collaborative resource sharing about experiential education opportunities. The UM Career Center utilizes Handshake, a career and internship search tool; The Division of Student Affairs uses OrgSync, a co-curricular involvement electronic platform; and some academic departments use Blackboard to disseminate pertinent internship resources to large groups of students. Because several electronic platforms are already in place at UM, these platforms will be more effective
and reach more students with improved collaboration among campus stakeholders wanting to share information about internships. These electronic tools are already purchased and implemented, making this recommendation a low-cost method of improving collaboration in and internship resource sharing at UM.

Some focus group participants expressed apprehension about the competitive nature of applying for internships, noting that African American students sometimes avoid applying for internships because of fear of rejection. Regular workshops focusing on familiarizing students with networking and the internship application processes could alleviate student concerns of not feeling adequately prepared to secure internships. Facilitators of such workshops may find Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) helpful in encouraging students to accept and navigate difficulties related to searching, applying for, and securing internships. Deborah Serani, Psy.D. (2011) broadly defined ACT as a form of mindfulness that promotes enhanced well-being by overcoming negative thoughts and feelings. Dr. Serani further explains that ACT could also address personal ability to change one’s behaviors and reactions to situations causing negative feelings. In other words, even if the process of securing internships is perceived as being difficult or inequitable, teaching students how to address and accept reality and how to cope with their negative feelings could empower them to engage in challenging situations, such as applying to internships, rather than avoiding them. Workshops or events allowing students to discuss their feelings and strategize about how to overcome them to apply for and engage in internship opportunities. Publicly allowing students who have previously participated in internships and those who have experienced similar challenges or negative feelings may provide opportunities to facilitate dialogue amongst student peers aimed towards reducing anxiety and stress about the process of finding and securing internships.
Transparency related to the costs associated with internships lends another opportunity to improve communication about these experiences taking place way from campus. The university should disseminate internship information in the form of a pamphlet (digital and print) to share costs associated with participating in internships, especially those that are unpaid and require travel away from UM’s main campus. Minimizing the sticker shock of internship costs is important since students in this study cited finances as a barrier to internship participation. The pamphlet should also include institutional funding sources (i.e. scholarships and grants) that could supplement the costs of internships requiring travel or forfeiture of paid work opportunities. This resource should be used and shared by academic advisors, financial aid advisors, internship coordinators, and UM Career Center staff for the UM community to be consistent and transparent about the costs associated in pursuing internships.

**Pathways for Internship Participation**

Identifying pathways for internship participation within each academic unit is the final proposed action. Strategies to identify pathways for internship participation include publishing a year-by-year guide on a central campus website, such as the Career Center, UM Division of Outreach, and Center for Student Success and First Year Experience, which would be helpful as students are researching internship opportunities and wanting to incorporate an internship into their academic degree plans. Such a guide should be visually appealing and attention-grabbing, providing information on when to complete critical steps in securing internship opportunities and how to access financial resources supporting high-impact practices. Because the intent for the guide is to help students visualize suggested steps needed to prepare for an internship, it will alleviate student concerns of lacking awareness of internship opportunities. As an inclusion with academic advising packets, the guide is foreseen to emphasize considerations for internship
participation such as where it may fit within academic coursework alongside the suggested sequence for four-year degree completion. The guide should be included in departmental student success plans for additional accountability and consistency. Developing and disseminating the guide will be successful with collaboration from various campus stakeholders, including academic advisors, internship coordinators, and career advisors. The internship network proposed in the first strategy will be foundational in disseminating this information to campus stakeholders. Collaboration is central to each proposed action, where internship efforts are envisioned as evolving to be more intentional and concerted at the University of Mississippi.

Table 1 summarizes proposed actions and implementation strategies.

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The Internship Experiences in the University of Mississippi Division of Outreach and Continuing Studies where Phillips serves should re-examine its practices related to recruitment and programming to ensure equitable practices. First, recruitment strategies should include general information about internships and their benefits to underclassmen to ensure inclusiveness in recruitment. Current practices are implemented with the assumption that students are aware of internship resources prior to seeking enrollment in the Internship Experiences. Staff members should not make the assumption that students know what internships are before seeking services in the office, so programming should be incorporated to educate students about career resources and internships at UM. The director has previously contributed to the EDHE 105: Freshman Year Experience textbook, so similar activities are suggested to continue to ensure exposure to internships and career resources early in UM students’ academic career. Workshops for undergraduate UM students to increase awareness of internships and promoting internship research are a no-to-low cost method of garnering student interest in pursuing internship opportunities. The UM Internship Experiences has previously implemented workshops to promote programs, more frequent and targeted programs are suggested to improve access. The UM Internship Experiences could also be the unit responsible for organizing the internship network for faculty and staff involved in career and academic advising.

The Ole Miss Athletics Training Program where Saxon serves provides internship opportunities for student-athletes regardless of their financial status. Saxon’s work and practice
within the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics has shown that student-athletes, regardless of their scholarship status, lack urgency when committing to participation in an internship experience. The training program eliminates financial barriers among student-athletes seeking internships, but inadvertently presents students with tough decisions on whether to take a course for academic credit and receive the same financial support or participate in the training program. While there are staff challenges in the life-skills area regarding monitoring NCAA legislation and internship experiences, Saxon advocates for collaboration and promotion of programs like the Internship Experience to maximize benefits for student-athletes at the University of Mississippi.

These recommended actions for improving internship access are broad and will benefit UM’s general student population. The bigger question remains: How is internship participation for African American students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds enhanced? Results from this study suggest that understanding and addressing disparities in areas such as efficacy and social capital are needed to improve internship access for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. Students in our study with minority identities (mostly African American) perceive more barriers to career success and less commitment to career choice than their White peers, which is consistent with existing studies related to minority career success (Quimby, Wolfson, & Seyala, 2007). Because students in the study talk about feelings of inadequate preparedness for internships in both social and academic settings, exploring models of self-efficacy may be helpful as a resource to support enhanced internship and subsequent career success for African American students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Albert Bandura, as cited by the American Psychological Association defines self-efficacy as, “an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce
specific performance attainments” (APA, n.d.). Because students perceive issues such as inconsistent knowledge of internships, inadequate personal networks, limited university support, and financial stress as being related to racial inequality at the University of Mississippi, the institution should directly address these concerns while encouraging success with internships. Explicitly addressing racially driven challenges and experiences students face when entering professional spaces is critical in preparing them for successful long-term career outcomes. It is evident that several challenges are perceived for minority groups, so preparing students for success by promoting self-efficacy may be necessary since the likelihood of these challenges becoming non-existent is minimal. Facilitators of the workshops and trainings targeted to minority student organizations cited in this study’s proposed action plan should be intentional in addressing perceived challenges and provide students with resources to overcome them.
DISSEMINATION AND FUTURE USE OF FINDINGS

This study elucidated inconsistencies in internship access and information shared at UM. As a result of this research, the issues that present some significance to students include race, socioeconomic status, and academic discipline. The awareness of internship inequities explored in this study is a good place to start for UM to begin addressing concerns regarding internship access, but a more investigative approach into quality may be a reasonable next step. UM’s internship courses on record in the course catalog need to be assessed for quality to better understand internship offerings and practices at UM from a programmatic and curricular perspective. Concurrently, special attention needs to be given to the assessment of demographics and outcomes of students who are presently accessing these internship courses. This data will be used to inform decisions related to access, equity, and quality.

Findings of this study will be shared with respective supervisors in the Division of Outreach and Continuing Studies and the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics to increase awareness of internship inequities and contribute to dialogue on improving internships and access to them at UM. For example, Phillips was team leader of a group of UM practitioners who attended the AAC&U’s 2017 Institute on High-Impact Practices and Student Engagement, and the group continues discussion on how to improve activity considered to be high-impact practices at UM. She will share findings and conclusions from the study with this group. The B.A. Rudolph Foundation funded this study, so we will present to its board, who is interested in answering similar questions of internship access and equity in national discussions. The study
will also be presented at the National Society for Experiential Education’s Conference in September 2018 to compare practices regarding issues of internship access and equity with representatives from diverse institutions from across the country.
SUMMARY

Internships can create opportunities that allow students to make meaning of career and academic intersectionality and to cultivate confidence and capability to be successful in their career aspirations. The students who shared their knowledge of internships and their experiences while participating in such programs provided us with increased awareness for impending enhancement of UM students’ post-graduate outcomes, such as socioeconomic mobility and timely career attainment. The data in this case study illustrated the potential for critical improvements in resource dissemination and implementation at the University of Mississippi. Because collaboration was central to the recommendations for UM, conversation generation in regards to internships at UM is critical to work towards enhanced internship quality and more equitable practices. Through internships, the University would provide students with academic excellence and experiential education opportunities as desired in the most recent UM strategic plan, “Flagship Forward.” Internships better prepare students with the skills and initiative necessary to work in a globally competitive work force. Attentive design and integration of internships in each academic major, in turn, benefits all UM stakeholders because students and faculty would be equipped with tangible experience to indicate mastery of skills learned in the classroom and provide industry partners with competent, skilled employees.
LIST OF REFERENCES
References


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Mississippi State University Career Center (n.d.) About Us. Retrieved from https://www.career.msstate.edu/about/


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: UM JUNIOR AND SENIOR ENROLLMENT BY IHL ETHNICITY
### Appendix A

UM Junior and Senior Enrollment by IHL Ethnicity

#### Table 2

**Fall 2017-Junior and Senior Enrollment By IHL Ethnicity, Excluding Liberal Arts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
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<th>African American</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
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APPENDIX B: COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS JUNIOR AND SENIOR ENROLLMENT BY IHL ETHNICITY
APPENDIX B

College of Liberal Arts Junior and Senior Enrollment by IHL Ethnicity

Table 3
College of Liberal Arts, Fall 2017-Juniors and Senior Enrollment By IHL Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
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</table>
VITA

JENNIFER N. SAXON

South Carolina State University  Orangeburg, SC
Master of Science in Counselor Education/Secondary Education, 2011
Bachelor of Science in Physical Education/Health Education Services, 2008

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

University of Mississippi  Oxford, MS
Assistant Athletics Director for Student-Athlete Development  August 2014- Present

• Responsible for creating programming for 400 student-athletes and athletics department staff in the areas of career development, personal advancement, community engagement and diversity & inclusion.
• Chaired athletics and university events to include but not limited to: The Rebels’ Choice Awards and UM Community Connection week.
• Fostered relationships with local schools, non-profits and organizations to include but not limited to: Oxford City Schools, Lafayette County Schools, Oxford-Lafayette Humane Society, Oxford-Lafayette Boys and Girls Club, UM McLean Institute, The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation and UM Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement.
• Oversee all aspects of athletics student groups to include but not limited to: Rebels’ International, Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), Ole Miss Athletics Diversity and Inclusion Committee.
• Served on University and Athletics special committees to include but not limited to: Chuck Mullins Courage Award Breakfast, UM Black History Month, UM Housing Diversity, Social Justice and Inclusion Committee, UM Celebration of Achievement, Coordinated Community Resource Team and Council on Community Engagement.
• Developed and maintained Master Special Events Calendar in order to direct and strategize upcoming events with Community needs.
• Manage student-athlete appearance and promotional events approval and denials for the department of athletics
• Created team and individual community service tracking system for University and student-athletes.
• Assist with Athletics Department special presentations and events as assigned to include: Black History Month, Chucky Mullins Award Breakfast and Leadership Training.
• Created the Ole Miss Athletics Summer Training Program to provide experiential learning opportunities for student-athletes to gain professional work experience prior to graduation.
South Carolina State University  Orangeburg, SC
Assistant Athletic Director for Athletics Academic Enhancement/SWA  November 2012-August 2014

- Chaired special fundraising projects for the Athletic Department to include hosting potential donors, naming rights events, the athletics Hall of Fame and all special projects. Experience in monitoring corporate sponsorships and creating potential donor portfolios.
- Coordinate day-to-day responsibilities for the Athletic Academic Enhancement Program to include but not limited to: management of the budget, advisor sport assignments, student-athlete scheduling, Academic Progress Rate (APR) monitoring, university report writing, staff oversight and academic certification.
- Assisted the Director of Athletics in day-to-day operations as a member of the Department’s Senior Staff, managed special projects as needed, to include but not limited to securing travel arrangements, meeting coordination, donor cultivation and recruiting activities.
- Spearheaded department grant writing to include being consecutively being awarded the NCAA Supplemental Support Fund (SAF) Grant, Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) Drug and Alcohol Grant, MEAC Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) Project Grant.
- Served as primary community relations contact person to outside organizations including but not limited to public and private sector and school systems.
- Coordinated Youth Day activities hosting an average of 7,000 youth from the Southeast; to include the following activities: recruitment fair, guest artist presentation, ROTC recruitment program, athletic clinics featuring Men’s and Women’s Tennis, Women’s Volleyball and Women’s Soccer and Athletic Mini-Clinics.
- Developed and maintained Master Special Events Calendar in order to direct and strategize upcoming events with Community needs.
- Fostered relationships with local, schools, non-profits and organizations to include but not limited to Edisto Chapter of Habitat for Humanity, Red Cross, Orangeburg Sickle Cell Outreach, American Cancer Society Orangeburg Chapter, National Kidney Foundation, Orangeburg Consolidated School Districts 3, 4 & 5, Felton Laboratory School.
- Oversee the athletics departments Gender Equity Plan created during the NCAA Athletics Certification.
- Responsible for researching and developing the institutional NCAA APR Improvement Plan which include creating a campus wide committee, evaluation of effectives, APR forecasting and annual updates.
- Oversee student-athlete recognition programs to include Senior Night, Annual Awards Banquet and welcome and end of the year celebrations.
- Researched available services and suppliers as needed for special events, game day and departmental needs.

Life Skills Coordinator/Assistant Athletic Academic Enhancement  January 2009-October 2012

- Serve as the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) Advisor and created an executive board, directed special projects and monitored fundraising activities.
• Produced Life Skills programming for over 200 student-athletes to include Read with the Bulldogs, Lunch Buddies Mentoring Program, Student-Athlete Spotlight and Bulldog Leadership.

• Introduced and the student-athlete challenge program “Bulldog Challenge” to improve the student-athlete presence in the local and university community. Areas of importance included athletic excellence, academic excellence, community service, above and beyond and SAAC communication.

• Responsible for the academic oversight of Football, Volleyball, Softball and Women’s Basketball to include course scheduling, instructor meetings, staff updates, APR monitoring and tutor coordination.

• Assisted with Game Management for Football, Men’s Basketball and Women’s Basketball where I assisted in logistical coordination of teams, officials and staff.

• Created departmental policies and procedures to include the student-athlete handbook, athletics staff handbook and athletic academic enhancement to serve as guides for student-athletes and staff.

• Supervised institutional NCAA recertification reporting and data collection.

• Designed “Bulldog Speaker Series” that engaged institutional and local colleges to discuss specific topics to include financial literacy, career development, public speaking, networking, and leadership.

• Developed Student-Athlete appearance form to effectively track community service and appearances by student-athletes during matriculation.

• Developed and execute the annual new student-athlete orientation program. Responsibilities include but not limited to scheduling of speakers, banner introduction session, NCAA academic requirements, university tour, and scheduling and classroom decorum.

**Professional Organizations/ Memberships**

• Selected to serve on the MEAC Hall of Fame Committee, 2014

• Co-Chair, MEAC Athletic Academic Support Association, 2013

• Delegate, NCAA Convention, 2014

• Graduate, NCAA Leadership Institute, 2012-2013

• Facilitator, MEAC SAAC In-Person Meeting, 2011 & 2012

• Facilitator, SEC Life Skills Directors Meeting, 2017 & 2018

• Attendee, SEC Career Tour, 2017

• Member, Women Leaders in College Sports

• Member, National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A)