

Use of adjuncts in conjunction with university professors for administrative internship supervision

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ABSTRACT

The author describes the model of internship supervision that is used at his university. The model has changed and is different than the norm. The combination of adjunct instructors/supervisors, site supervisors, and university professors makes for a dynamic partnership that adds significant quality to the program and for the intern/students. The standards that the program is based upon are further strengthened through such a model. Constant integration occurs within this model and a reiteration of the standards through each aspect of the internship is obvious with this partnership. Consistency has been increased through such a model as well. Student interns are regularly exposed to the elements of the ELCC (Educational Leadership Consortium Council) standards through all aspects. Supervising adjuncts remain under the training and oversight of the university professors in a much tighter way than in previous supervision models. Regular forums are set-up several times a semester where student interns, supervisors, and university professors meet and discuss topics as well as the usual individualized meetings on-site that the interns have with their site supervisors and the adjunct supervisors from the university. Overall, the nuances of this model have shown that the use of adjuncts under a structured format such as this is actually more beneficial than either just university professors doing the supervision or just adjuncts hired to meet in the field.

Keywords: internship, adjunct, supervision, university model

INTRODUCTION

Typically the university assigns student internship candidates to a university faculty member as a supervisor. Recently incoming student numbers have risen to the point that the few university faculty employed within the department could not adequately cover the increased numbers of student interns in the field. Do to the immediate retirement of a faculty member a change was eminent. The university decided to hire several adjuncts to cover in-the-field administrative internships, not different than many other institutions. The university's own unique model began to evolve.

BACKGROUND

The original model had one faculty member who was hired only to take care of all the interns. That faculty member had worked with at this university for many years (over ten years) and now announced plans for retirement. The finances within the Educational Leadership department did not dictate immediately hiring a full-time replacement. This was compounded by the fact that the university now had three times the interns to service since program enrollment had increased over the past years. The bigger problem then became how to provide quality supervision of the interns in the field without the use of a full-time faculty member.

It was determined that the university would supplement this retiring faculty member with several part time adjuncts serving the interns as needed by the student population. The university did not follow any local model that was evident. Most universities within the general area had full-time faculty sharing internship supervision duties as well as teaching responsibilities at that time. A few institutions did have adjuncts doing the supervision work but they were independently contracted and had few ties with the university on a regular and/or daily basis, something faculty were not in favor of in this situation. The faculty felt that the rigor and quality of the internship experiences may be lost if it were contracted in such a manner. University personnel had informally heard from other faculty sources from other local universities outside this university that such a model was less than effective.

Models were researched and the university attempted to create a model that would work within their own unique financial confines (Arbaugh, et al, 2007; Perry, 1970 and 1990; Jasinska, 2007). Faculty were not completely in favor of having multiple adjuncts responsible for interns in the field and realized that coordinating a group of supervising adjuncts could be problematic. The university clearly needed to move forward so three (3) part-time adjuncts were hired.

THE LITERATURE

Organizational models regarding internship structure and placement were sought to determine which scenario could best meet the university needs, now that finances and personnel issues, as well as increasing enrollment became new factors. The literature came from several areas of focus. The cognitive learning processes were examined to see if there is any one best way in which to operate an internship/practicum experience from a learning and evaluation perspective, feedback from students was taken into account, also innovative and successful models of such internship-type experiences were also sought. Arbaugh, et al. (2007) was an interesting source, although focused on science and mathematics teachers it had relevance in the internship phase since it can be largely non-disciplinary in nature, this study provided several

new ways of looking at connecting interns, students, and university program components. Concerns seem common among studies as Arbaugh, et al (2007) points to needs and experiences of the interns themselves as elements that may guide an effective structure for the future. Arbaugh also spent some time analyzing student responses not dissimilar from those of this university. Who was assigned to whom and how the structure could best facilitate ease of supervision, economic factors, and maintaining close university ties were of the utmost importance to the university and faculty alike.

The structure of the internship experience obviously needed to change from the university's own internal data but this must be kept consistent with what is known about learning in general and especially the older, non-traditional learner that typifies the student body within this university's Educational Leadership program. As Shulman (1987) points out one must understand how teaching is to be understood and how teachers are to be trained and evaluated, the same follows for administrators since the internship phase has been so similar for so many years, at least in this particular university setting. To paraphrase Shulman in within this setting, one must understand administrators and how administrators need to be trained. This largely shaped the process by which a redesign would begin.

Perry (1970 and 1990) discusses the optimal forms of intellectual development in order to best assure ethical behavior from the students, something that this university was intent upon keeping as a hallmark of their graduating interns. It was clear that whatever process would be adopted it must remain solid in the ethical development of any leadership elements. Green (2012) suggests a problem-based approach to dealing with the standards in an educational leadership program, something that the faculty had all ready aligned within the written and taught curriculum, but this became an element that now needed to be congruent with the internship/practicum field experiences in which they engaged students, something that may or may not have been an element of previous program decisions. The previous model employed had been in operation long before any current faculty had been at the university and no decisions on format had been made up to this time that involved current faculty. Danielson (2007) research is in the area of learning processes and aligning how best university students learn with methodology and structure that is most likely for mastery learning to occur. The university keenly wished to make the best connections possible to insure the best results in student learning. All interns must pass a state exam for certification at the end of their program work. The university had experienced a very high passing rate (98% in the previous year) but wished to not change anything that could affect those numbers. Since many changes were required to happen at the same time; change in structure, new faculty, expertise of faculty, and now additional students; it was imperative that learning theory be not just considered but guide present and future decision-making for the program itself. The Bain (2004) text helped faculty adapt the Danielson learning elements to the university structure in a more familiar manner to most of the faculty members. The two authors' works helped to gain perspective on how to best structure situations for optimal learning from learning theory standpoint as well as ways in which students appear to be most comfortable.

There appeared to be no one way to do this restructuring best. The research and literature had many options and many of those options were successful in scenarios that had been studied both here in the United States and abroad (Jasinska, 2007 and Arbaugh et al, 2007). The faculty had to determine what is the best alignment of learning theory, practice, and structure that could move this program forward while keeping personnel and finances as important restricting

elements. Some models simply could not work in this university due to potential cost factors for implementation.

Since some of the program material is presented in an on-line format we researched internship strategies that could also align with such a delivery model, the work of Jasinska (2007) was examined to see its relevance. Jasinska discussed the diversity of internship in her research, many with traditional formats. She also developed a table of successful internship strategies as well as barriers to success which was helpful in supporting the elements that faculty had found within their own surveys and evaluations from the previous years. This study indicated elements of structure, among other variables, which were helpful to this university's program restructuring. Strengths and weaknesses of traditional internships were listed and again, these aligned with what university faculty and administration had seen within their own program to date and confirmed specific practices to both support and to avoid, such as lack of good quality coaching, limited time, not enough attention given to students, and on the positive end, aims aligned with university goals, a well organized didactic process, presence of supervisor to give support (Jasinska, 2007).

No one way was selected as best but many of the underlying ideas presented in the literature were incorporated into the development of a model that would likely serve the students best with the resources available.

The literature certainly had some limitations since few studies and writings clearly aligned perfectly with this particular scenario, with these variables, but many of the issues, solutions, and models dealt with similar problems that are very close to the redesign, restructuring elements of this university. It is hoped that this model will help to serve as another beginning point to carry on other research. This university will continue to collect data and determine what elements of the structure seem to be the key elements and an attempt will be made to link that to student performance and ultimate success of the student interns.

PLAN

An immediate nuance that was planned included the connection of the newly hired three (3) adjuncts with a university supervisor who oversees them tighter than the usual way. This was a unique step from any models the faculty/administration were aware of locally. The adjuncts are all working administrators in the field: a superintendent, a middle school principal, and an elementary principal. The interesting dimension to this is the fact that each of these adjuncts has their own circle or network that obviously serves their own assigned students. This provides a much richer experience than either – if they were supervised by the university faculty alone or if student were just assigned any adjunct, not a working adjunct. The students now have the university supervisor as a classroom instructor during this same time frame, the connection with a working-in-the-field adjunct as a supervisor, and their regular site-supervisor of the internship in the field. Each student intern has three professionals connecting with them and coordinating their activities, their progress on the Educational Leadership program standards, etc. The power of such a relationship became evident after the first semester working within this model. The internal evaluation data shows that there is a strong and positive connection between student interns and the supervision staff (similarly seen in Perry, 1970). This data was in the form of the university's typical and usual course-ending evaluation form that the university uses for all courses. Although the format of the evaluation form does not specifically address internship, faculty received many comments in the open comments section that related this close-knit

experience. Prior to that time very few evaluation comments that related to the internship experience other than negative comments based on a specific problem a specific intern may have had with the structure, communications, or supervision through the student's assigned adjunct.

The student intern numbers were in the range of six (6) students when the university was still operating in the mode/model with a full-time faculty member supervising the group. The Educational Leadership program was increasing the size of the cohort groups (merely through increasing admissions) and now facing internship groups of about eighteen (18). The first end-of-year evaluation had eight (8) positive comments from the eighteen (18) students. In the immediate year prior to that faculty received no positive comments from the group of six (6) students, but three (3) negative comments surrounding internship supervision issues. Data is limited obviously to the small number of students but the drastic turn around of no negative comments to now several positive comments seemed quite encouraging to us; a trend which has continued over the past three years now. The actual number of students assigned per adjunct is the same as it was when full-time faculty members covered six (6) students so the faculty determined that the data is somewhat comparable even though the model is clearly different.

The depth of the interns' experience and the active connection to working administrators in the field has increased several-fold through this process. Although this came about through necessity of sheer incoming student numbers and finances it has proven to be a strong model for the strengthening of the intern's learning and skill development (Bain, 2004 and Perry, 1990).

The interns were assigned to their adjunct supervisor on the basis of geographic location originally, just out of ease for the supervisor. The university cohort group of interns covers hundreds of square miles across the western section of New York State. However, faculty meet officially three times per semester with all interns and all supervisors together, this has caused the supervisors to connect with the interns outside their geographic area but now based upon their own level of interest in a particular position. Having a working superintendent, a middle school principal, and an elementary principal all as supervisors has led student interns to seek out those within their field of interest during the three meetings. This past year, these eventually have evolved into more of an open forum because of this fact. Students have found tremendous connections through this model and claim they have felt closer to administration and more confident in what they are doing and how it relates to the real world of administration based upon comments in the end of course evaluations.

We had hoped the use of adjuncts would not take away from the continuity of the program. Through the use of connecting the University supervisor with the adjuncts, meeting three times with all interns each semester as a total group; the continuity has actually been strengthened more than could have planned. The expertise of the adjuncts is smoothly integrated into these meetings and the depth of professionalism has increased throughout as well. Student interns now have a cadre of administrators they are beginning to know in a professional manner with a closeness that had not happened before in a more traditional one-on-one, intern-supervisor assignments as in the past (Bain, 2004 and Henson, 2010).

Each adjunct is assigned no more than six (6) student interns as indicated in Figure 1, in their immediate geographic area. Their duty is to monitor the intern's plan of activity and their reflection process as it relates to the program standards. The supervisors typically meet with the students prior to beginning their internship, initially meeting with the site supervisor at the school site, meet after a month or so, then meeting periodically throughout the process as each individual intern's need dictate, and meeting with all parties to wrap up the internship as the recommended number of contact hours move towards completion .

The latest scenario now requires the interns and the adjunct supervisors to meet with the University supervisor as a whole group officially three times a semester in addition to any on-site meetings they have. This meeting typically has eighteen (18) students with three (3) supervisors. This is a structured, prescheduled meeting denoted at the beginning of the semester. The format consists of a general discussion and sharing time regarding internship issues and then break into groups first by geographical area and then students get together by interest group, sometimes also as a whole group depending upon student intern needs. This methodology was new to faculty. Not much group activity had been done in the past; the internships were very much individualized in previous years. The Educational leadership program now offers the best of both elements. It still is individualized for the intern in their site setting but they can benefit from the group more readily and easily through the group sessions (Danielson, 2007). Faculty believe that due to these forums maintain a much stronger connection with the university standards; as Green mentions in setting the structure for appropriate learning situations for leadership (Green, 2012).

These unintended outcomes have all been for the benefit of the Educational Leadership program and the students. The university intends to continue using this type of model and refine the elements that help to align the standards in the most effective way for student learning and resource deployment at the University level (Perry, 1990). Again, comments that have been garnered through the course ending evaluations over the past years have indicated this connection to be true.

The demands on the student interns by way of program standards and the built in University assessments are tempered and supported by the real life experiences of the working adjunct supervisors and the student placements themselves (Danielson, 2007 and Bain, 2004). It is easy at the university level to get caught up in internal standards and curricular issues while not giving the real-world job requirements as much focus or simply not keeping pace with the evolving needs of today's administrator (Bain, 2004). This model helps us all balance the elements for student interns. The students get the best of both practice and theory in such a model with many experienced supervisors working together as a single cohesive team (Bain, 2004 and Perry, 1990).

APPENDIX

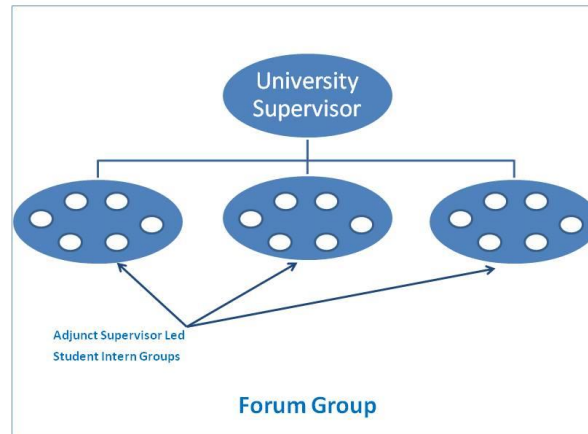


Figure 1: The Forums are large sessions that deal with all students, all adjunct supervisors, and are hosted by the university professor(s). Each circle represents the student intern group(s) that are headed by a single adjunct supervisor-working administrator. The small circles within each larger circle represent the student interns.

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