Online Principal Program Student Perceptions and Recommendations for 
Improving the Principal Internship

Presentation and Discussion; Dr. Robert Nicks, Dr. Gary Martin, Dr. Tilisa Thibodeaux, Dr. Elvis Arterbury

Introduction

State and national program standards for principal internship experiences encourage relevant activities and faculty analysis of program quality. Continuous improvement of the internship is a necessary objective of any program seeking national recognition and by design, feedback from students who have recently completed the internship are important to this process. It is understood that the internship is an integral element to properly preparing future principals, but many internship programs do not offer needed experiences (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr and Cohen, 2007). When internship activities lack key elements such as purpose, structure, and rigor, the benefits normally associated with a quality internship are not met (Valesky, Carter, and Huene-Johnson, 2008). While all principal preparation programs should monitor the relevance of internship activities, it is perhaps more challenging for online programs due to the nature of the program delivery model. This study sought to identify concerns and recommendations for improving online internship experiences.

Over 340 students participated in a qualitative design survey used to investigate the thoughts and perspectives of principal program students who had completed the internship. Qualitative research presents the opportunity to collect information and focus on the perspectives of each participant, and their interpretive view (Cresswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002). Former interns were asked to respond to program issues designed to address three research questions; (1) What internship activities should the university keep in its requirements? (2) What additional internship activities or requirements should be included in the program? (3) What internship activities and requirements should be changed or deleted?

An analysis of survey responses indicated key findings concerning internship activities and requirements in the areas of web conferencing, video submission, number of internship hours, and time management issues. Additional research findings included perceptions of internship support mechanisms and flexibility in selecting internship activities. The research is significant in that it provides data relevant to online internship programs which is an increasingly popular delivery model. Session attendees will be asked to provide input about their own internship programs and a Q&A opportunity will follow the presentation.
Sample Findings of Study

Interns expressed the following:

1. A desire for additional shadowing opportunities with accompanying knowledge of roles/jobs/functions
2. The importance of aligning internship activities to course content, thus merging theory and practice
3. A request for greater flexibility in selecting internship activities
4. Frequent checkpoints on internship progress with supervisor feedback
5. A desire for greater flexibility concerning reflection activities and include multiple models for different types of activities
6. A greater focus and time dedicated to leading professional growth activities
7. An opportunity to work with additional mentors at different schools and grade levels
8. The importance of activities that focus on analyzing data and understanding accountability measures
9. The advantages of collaborating with fellow interns via social media
10. The importance of having opportunities to collaborate with professors on internship issues during course associated web conferences
11. A desire for an opportunity to be “administrator for a full day”
12. Additional learning opportunities are needed for video production and uploading if videos are required
13. The need for assignment flexibility is important during summer months when it is difficult to find collaborating personnel
14. A desire for more activities that focus on the new teacher and principal evaluation models for Texas
15. The need to interact with assistant principals as most interns will probably begin administrative careers in this position
16. Appreciation for learning opportunities involving case studies and scenarios
17. A desire by out-of-state students to use data and practices relevant to their respective state
18. A request for activities focused on working with community members
19. A desire for internship credit for experiences generated through existing administrative positions
20. The importance of using authentic budget documents when activities focus on budget development and reporting, and
21. Consolidate interviews with the principal to cover multiple internship activities

Future Use of Study Findings

The researchers will utilize the study data in developing a presentation and paper submitted to NCPEA for the summer conference, 2017.