

Internship Reflection

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My internship was a cooperation with Dr. Matt Gregory, Dean of Students at Texas Tech University. With Dr. Gregory's guidance I researched, outlined, and created a 'Healthy Masculinity' program. The starting vision was to address ideas of 'toxic' and 'healthy' masculinity. Initially the aim was to target the university football team, though there was (and is) a hope of one day expanding the program further, perhaps even into a credit course. This internship was done entirely remote, and as such I cannot provide any assessment or opinion on the entire institution or even the larger Student Affairs department. While I would have enjoyed being able to interact with others on campus and in the institution, I did not find the virtual aspect to be particularly limiting.

Duties and Responsibilities

The earliest discussions between Dr. Gregory and myself revolved around the key objectives of the program, as well as the audience, the setting, and other relevant details. Dr. Gregory communicated his vision to me and provided the context for which the program would be provided. It was clear from the beginning that this would be a self-led project. Dr. Gregory placed a large amount of trust in me to execute his vision and did not micromanage my work. Our weekly meetings served to check-in, discuss progress and challenges, and review work completed.

Dr. Gregory provided a few foundational pieces to build on, such as a reference program developed by Kansas and several other pieces of research and media. My first endeavor was to review the 10-week Kansas University program by putting myself through as a participant. I completed the readings, activities, and journal topics. I then took a second pass through the

course, this time from the perspective of the facilitator, paying special attention to the lesson plans, sequencing, discussion notes, etc.

In addition I also researched similar programs around the nation. Brown (Brown University Health Services, n.d.), Princeton (Princeton University, n.d.), Tulane (Nankin, 2019), and various other schools have all implemented programs ranging from credit courses to voluntary focus groups. A finding that struck me about similar projects was the mixed response they have received. Conservative politicians have labeled them as a “war on men” (Schneider, 2017) and “insulting to the parents of the young boys who participated and the values that were instilled in them growing up” (Buttitta, 2019). The criticism is not a partisan issue, even progressive voices have disparaged these programs by labeling them as “marketing tool[s]” (Buttitta, 2019). What makes Buttitta’s (2019) criticism poignant and worth noting is that she balances it with constructive criticism, “For a program to be effective, it would need to address... the complicated relationships people have with masculinity not only because of their gender identity, but because of their other identities, including race, class, sexuality and ability.” Taking this comment to heart, I wanted to ensure that the program was not a marketing tool and was aimed to critically address the intersections mentioned by Buttitta.

With this in mind, I began by researching the topics we hoped to cover, which included emotional expression, social justice, feminism, and sexuality among other things. I sought the most recent scholarly research and publications available, with special attention given to our intended audience of college-aged males. I also sought out various pieces of pop media – YouTube videos, Ted Talks, movies, etc. My hope was to include relevant connections to pop culture in order to facilitate real-world connections between the content, reading, and discussions.

After I was satisfied with my gathered research and materials, I created a program outline. This stage was when I planned the sequence of weekly topics and associated learning outcomes. With an outline in place, I then created each week's lesson plan, and organized the project into units. Each folder contained the lesson plan and any necessary readings, handouts, and other materials. As I would not be implementing this program myself it was vital that I provide clear and concise documentation and instructions for whomever eventually led the program. Along with the outlines and organization I also created presentations for each week. This included organizing slides, graphics, video clips, and everything else that would be needed in the demonstration and presentation.

Finally, I reviewed and finalized by leading myself (and sometimes my cats) through the course, similar to how I began the internship. Dr Gregory informed that ideally a program such as this would be focus grouped prior to beginning, but given time and COVID-related restraints this was not possible. Instead, I shared the program with several colleagues of Dr. Gregory and myself, including professors and administrators. Because we could not do a trial, this final set of reviews, revisions, and polish was especially important.

M.Ed. Program Objectives

Demonstrate knowledge of student development theory, student characteristics and the effects of college on students to be able to design and evaluate learning experiences for students.

My supervisor and I had several discussions around student development theories and how they related to this program. Overall, the program has an objective of shifting the consciousness of participants by putting them in types of identity crises described by Erikson's Identity Development Theory. According to Erikson's *Stage Five: Identity versus Identity Diffusion*, identity development occurs while one is becoming independent, experiencing the

complexities of life, and exploring the question “Who am I?” (Patton et al., 2015). This program creates the stage and provides the tools for students to engage with the questions and discussions that will help to define their sense of self as males.

Acquire research, evaluation and assessment skills to be able to evaluate research and programs and to assess results to improve professional practice and student learning.

I had the real-world experience of researching and creating a program. Unfortunately I won't be able to assess and report on results as part of this course, but I hope to keep in close contact with Dr. Gregory to continue discussing the outcomes and results of the course.

Learn social justice principles and how these principles can impact access, opportunity and success within higher education environments.

This program encompassed several aspects of social justice education in practice. Through the research and design of this program I was able to explore how addressing these topics would impact the larger student body and campus. Dr. Gregory and myself hoped that the incorporation of social justice and community service projects into this program would help drive home the importance of social justice.

Conclusion

Overall, I gained a tremendous amount of insight and relevant experience from this internship. Most importantly I learned how a university program is created – from the birth of the idea, to the research and design, to the practicalities of its implementation. This was especially relevant to me because it was the idea of creating programs and other outreach efforts that initially sparked my interest in this M.Ed. program. This opportunity to further my experience showed me that I do enjoy this type of work, and it is something I'd like to pursue further. However I wish I would have been able to experience more of the institution. A big question mark

remaining for me is whether I would prefer to work in a large public institution similar to Texas Tech University, or a smaller institution such as Bellarmine. I enjoyed the experience and I hope to continue contact with Dr. Gregory to receive feedback once the program begins next semester.

References

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