

A Summary of Key NSCI Findings

One of the primary goals of the National Survey of College Internships (NSCI) is to problematize the notion of an “internship” from a single, homogenous type of program to one more varied in terms of quality, purpose and activity. Drawing on research from the learning sciences and experiential education we developed the Internship Scorecard for diagnosing, studying and evaluating internships across three critical features of an internship – **purpose and format, quality and equitable access** (Hora et al., 2020). Besides illuminating key aspects of the structure and quality of the internship as a venue for learning, the Scorecard also addresses issues of equity and access to internships, which has long been a problem plaguing the field.

This Data Snapshot is a brief collection of selected variables from your institution’s 2020 administration of the NSCI, organized by the three key categories of the Internship Scorecard. We hope that this information proves useful for conversations about student experiences with internships on your campus.

Overview of Survey and Study Sample

Data were collected at State University X in January 2021 through an online survey platform. The NSCI survey was distributed to all registered undergraduate students ($n = 15,838$) at State University X. We received in total 774 complete survey responses, which led to a response rate of 4.58%. The comparison group for some analyses included in this Data Snapshot includes 2,623 students at 5 similar campuses.

Participation in internships	State University X		National sample	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Total	129 (17.8%)	597 (82.2%)	573 (22.2%)	2010 (88.8%)
Gender				
Male	37 (28.7%)	157 (26.3%)	108 (19.6%)	400 (20.6%)
Female	92 (71.3%)	426 (71.4%)	442 (80.4%)	1538 (79.4%)
Race				
Asian	20 (15.6%)	78 (13.1%)	107 (18.8%)	264 (13.2%)
Black	9 (7%)	49 (8.2%)	19 (3.3%)	102 (5.1%)
Hispanic	4 (3.2%)	17 (2.9%)	70 (12.3%)	414 (20.6%)
White	85 (66.4%)	409 (68.5%)	317 (55.6%)	1035 (51.5%)
Two or More Races	5 (3.9%)	26 (4.4%)	44 (7.7%)	143 (7.1%)
Others	5 (3.9%)	18 (3%)	13 (1.5%)	50 (2.3%)
First-generation status				
First-generation students	46 (35.7%)	237 (39.7%)	140 (24.5%)	634 (31.6%)
Continuing-generation students	83 (64.3%)	360 (60.3%)	431 (75.5%)	1375 (68.4%)
Parental income level				
Low-income	48 (37.2%)	213 (35.7%)	140 (24.4%)	515 (25.6%)
Middle-income	75 (58.1%)	359 (60.1%)	372 (64.9%)	1305 (64.9%)
Upper-income	6 (4.7%)	25 (4.2%)	61 (10.7%)	190 (9.5%)

Note. Percentage in parenthesis. Due to missing data and rounding, detail may not sum to total or 100%

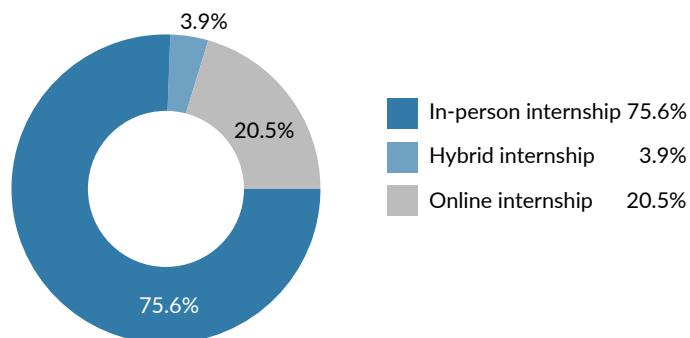


Internship Scorecard Category 1: Purpose and Format

This category of the Internship Scorecard captures students' intentions in pursuing an internship and the format of their programs, which are important indicators of the structure and purpose of an internship.

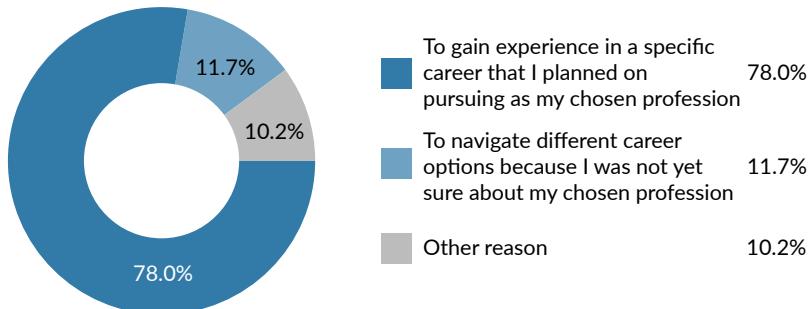
Modality of Internships

The modality of internships captures the critical issue of the location of the experience (in-person, online or both), which can shape the character and outcomes of the experience for students. This indicator also became particularly relevant during the Covid-19 pandemic with the growth of online internships.



Purpose of Internships

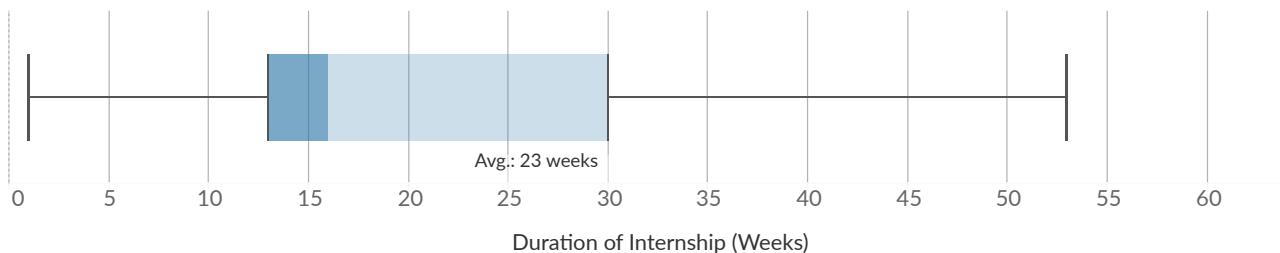
Students have different reasons for pursuing an internship, which may lead to different expectations, needs and outcomes. At State University X, nearly four in five respondents (78%, n=100) indicated that the main reason of taking the internship was to gain experience in a specific career that they planned on pursuing as their chosen profession.



Duration

While standards for internships vary according to discipline and program, they can range from very short experiences lasting just a few days to months long programs.

Of the **129** students who participated in an internship, the average internship duration was **23 weeks**. Looking at the distribution below, however, we see there are a number of outliers. For instance, one student reported a **60 week** internship:



Internship Scorecard Category 2: Quality

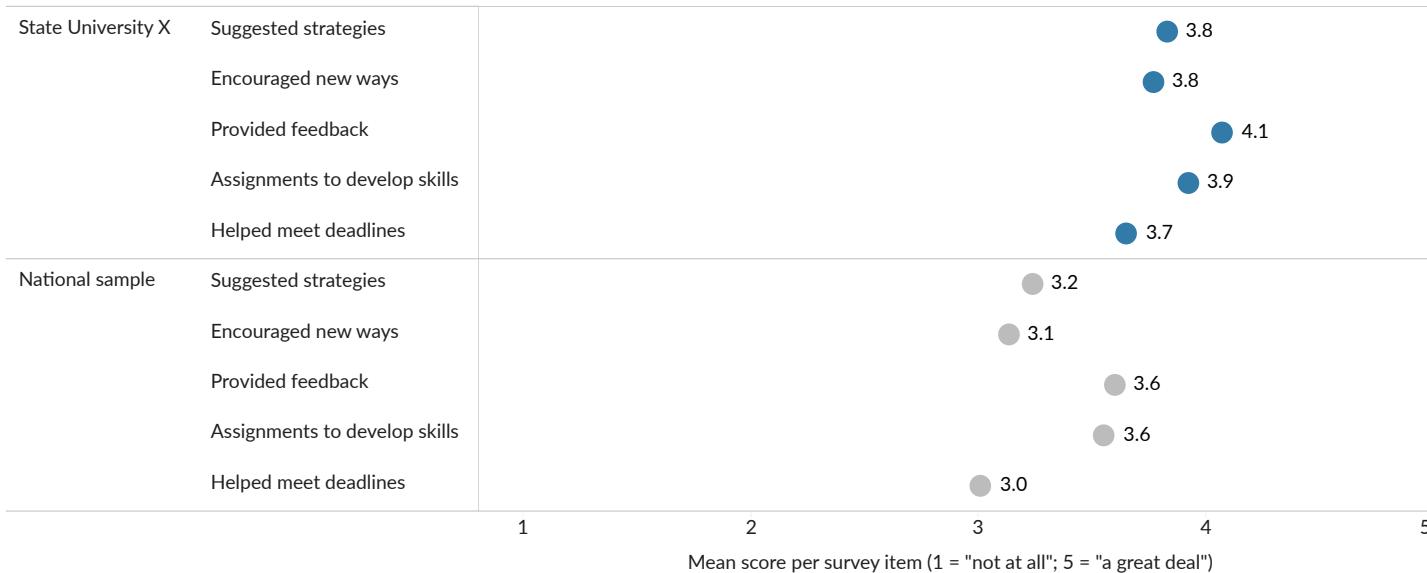
This category of the Internship Scorecard captures key indicators of the quality of an internship experience. Drawing on the research literature as well as national standards (e.g., NACE, CAS), quality indicators include supervision, satisfaction, nature of tasks, and use of learning plans.

Supervisor Mentoring

Having an effective and supportive supervisor is an important element of a successful internship experience, and supervisor mentoring captures the provision of direction and feedback about task performance and career planning to the student. This scale included 5 items such as, "How often did your supervisor suggest specific strategies for achieving career goals?"

Students at State University X, on average, rated the level of supervisor mentorship at a higher score compared to students from the 5 comparison institutions. For students at State University X, the mean supervisor mentoring score was 3.86 (on a scale from 1-5) with a standard deviation of 0.89, whereas the average for other students was 3.17 with a standard deviation of 0.97. This difference was statistically significant based on commonly used threshold ($p < 0.001$, $t = -9.92$, $df = 558$). The figure below provides a comparison of the mean scores along all mentorship items in the survey.

State University X (n = 128) and 5 Comparison Institutions (n = 560) for each item of the supervisor mentoring scale

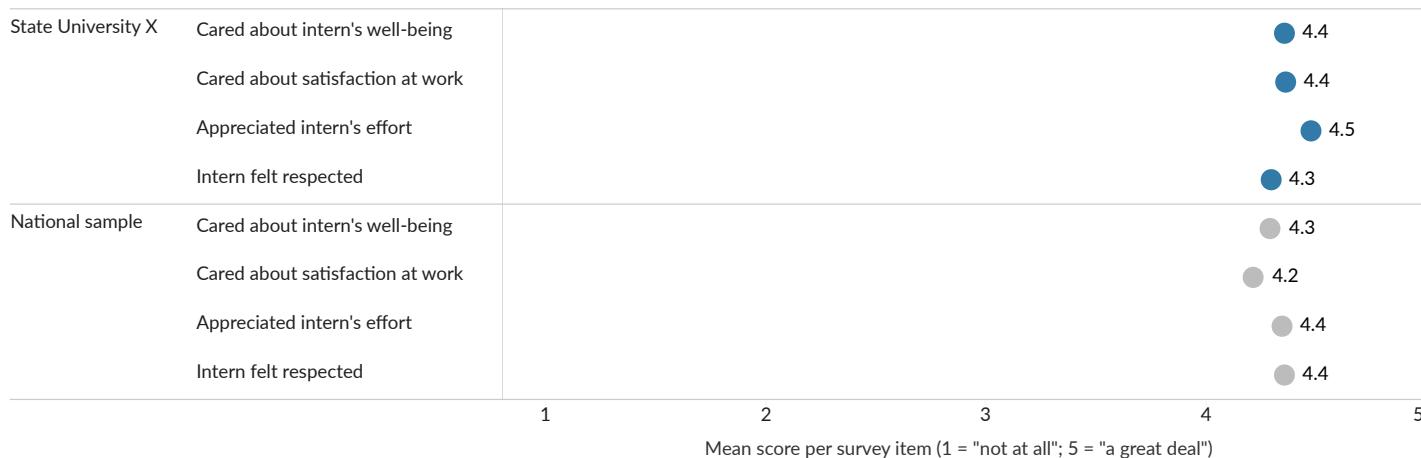


Supervisor Support

Another aspect of supervision highlighted in the research literature is that of supervisor support, which refers to supervisors' active support of interns' career development and on-the-job satisfaction. One question in this 4-item scale is, "In this internship, how much did your supervisor care about your well-being?"

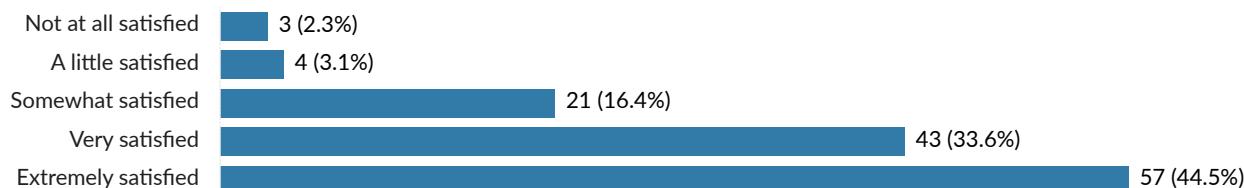
In general, students from State University X reported a level of supervisor support that was slightly higher compared to the 5 comparison institutions, but these differences are not statistically significant. On average, the level of support perceived by student interns at State University X was 4.37 (on a scale from 1-5), with a standard deviation of 0.81, whereas the average for all other institutions in our sample was 4.30, with standard deviation of 0.84.

**Comparison State University X (n = 128) and 5 Comparison Institutions (n = 573)
for each item of the supervisor support scale.**



Student Satisfaction with their Internships

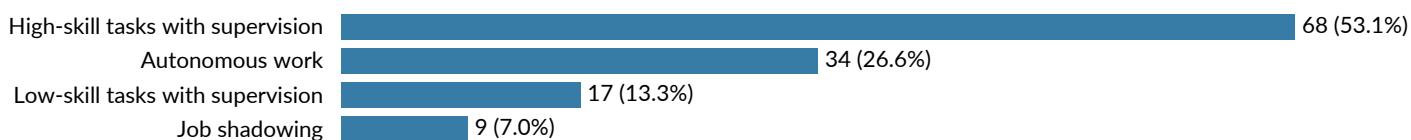
An important indicator of the usefulness and impact of an internship experience is how students themselves perceive their experience. Students at State University X reported being, on average, very satisfied with their internship experience ($M=4.15$, $SD=0.96$). This is a higher rating than students from the 5 comparison institutions ($M=4.02$, $SD=0.96$) though the difference is not statistically significant.



Note: One respondent did not provide an answer to this question.

Nature of Tasks Performed on the Internship

While different types of internships involve different types of tasks, one of the benefits of an experiential learning opportunity is the chance to learn and master autonomous work and high-skill tasks. For this quality indicator, we asked students about the types of tasks they performed during their internship.



Presence of an Internship Learning Plan

Another quality indicator included here is that of the presence of a learning plan, which is a formal, written document that is provided by an academic advisor and/or the internship supervisor. For 76% of the student interns at State University X, they were provided with this important tool for learning.



Development of Skills During the Internship

The final quality indicator in this Data Snapshot pertains to one of the promises of an internship experience – whether or not key skills are acquired. Sometimes called “soft” or “21st Century Skills” – terms that we dislike due to their obscuring the complexity of each individual competency – they are critical skills that are in high demand in the workplace. For this item, students indicated how often their internship provided opportunities for developing the following skills.

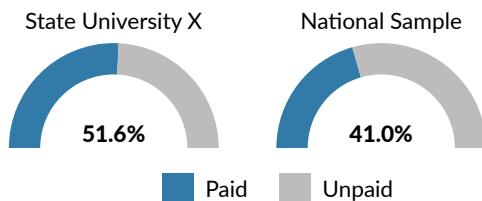
	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Very Often (4)	Extremely Often (5)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Communication	1	3	14	46	64	4.32	2.16
Teamwork	5	3	21	41	57	4.12	2.02
Problem Solving	2	2	13	41	69	4.36	2.20
Leadership	10	21	37	26	33	3.40	1.64

Internship Scorecard Category 3: Equitable Access

This category of the Internship Scorecard captures key indicators related to equitable access for internships, with a focus on compensation, the presence of anti-discriminatory policies at the internship site, and students’ experiences with discrimination. Additionally, the Scorecard highlights the critical issue of access, and the specific obstacles that are keeping too many college students from pursuing and taking an internship.

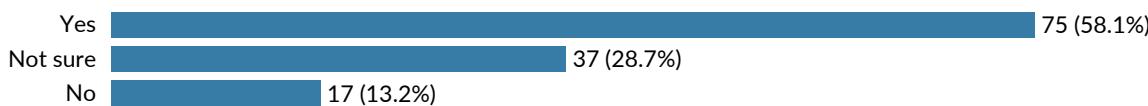
Compensation

Unpaid internships make it difficult for low-income and/or working students to participate, which presents a considerable barrier to access. One impact of the prevalence of unpaid internships is to limit access to these sometimes prestigious opportunities to wealthy (and well-connected) students.



Presence of Anti-Discrimination Policy

For this indicator we asked students if they were provided with a written document that explicitly described an organizational policy that prohibited discriminatory actions on the basis of race, gender, disability status, and so on. Such a statement reflects a commitment by the employer to maintaining a welcoming environment to student interns from all backgrounds, identities and experiences.



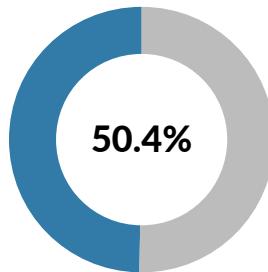
Experience of Discriminatory Behaviors

The NSCI survey then asks students about actual experiences during their internship where they felt discriminated against based on their race, gender, sexuality, disability status, and/or other personal attributes.



Obstacles Preventing Students from Taking an Internship

The final indicator for equitable access pertains to the obstacles that prevented students who had wanted to take an internship, from successfully pursuing and taking one. These findings indicate that a substantial number of students at State University X had wanted to take an internship but could not due to obstacles that included difficulties finding a placement, a heavy course load, the need to work, and cancellations due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



Among the **597** students who did not participate in an internship, **50.4%** expressed interest in doing so:

The students that expressed interest cited the following barriers to internship participation:

Unsure how to find an internship	Yes: 154 (51.2%)	No: 147 (48.8%)
Course load was too heavy	Yes: 149 (49.5%)	No: 152 (50.5%)
Had to work at current job	Yes: 137 (45.5%)	No: 164 (54.5%)
Cancelled due to COVID-19	Yes: 122 (40.5%)	No: 179 (59.5%)
Lack of internship opportunities	Yes: 109 (36.2%)	No: 192 (63.8%)
Was not selected when I applied	Yes: 93 (30.9%)	No: 208 (69.1%)
Insufficient pay offered	Yes: 92 (30.6%)	No: 209 (69.4%)
Lack of transport	Yes: 81 (26.9%)	No: 220 (73.1%)
Lack of childcare	Yes: 40 (13.3%)	No: 261 (86.7%)

Hora, M.T., Wolfgram, M., Brown, R., Colston, J., Zhang, J., Chen, Z., & Chen, Z. (2020). [The Internship Scorecard: A new framework for evaluating college internships on the basis of purpose, quality and equitable access. Research Brief #11](#). Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions. University of Wisconsin-Madison.