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Exploring school counseling students' unpaid internship experiences in their personal lives

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Exploring school counseling students' unpaid internship experiences in their personal lives

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate Faculty

Minnesota State University Moorhead

In partial fulfillment

of the Requirements of the Degree

Master of Science

By Tatiana Eggum

April, 2020

ANNOUNCEMENT OF ORAL DEFENSE

Name of Candidate: Tatiana A. Eggum

Degree Program and Major: Master of Science in School Counseling

Thesis Title: Exploring school counseling students' unpaid internship experience

Time and place: April 17th, 2020

Examining Committee: Taryn Akgul, EdD, MEd, BA
Samantha Gust
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Abstract

Research by Foss and Kelly, that graduate students face specific challenges in their lives due to multiple roles that they partake in as a student, professional and family member (2017). The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the impact of unpaid internship on school counseling students' personal lives by asking about their financial, social and emotional experience. The research focuses on school counseling students that are in an accredited program by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and are currently participating in an unpaid internship. After seven days the survey was deactivated and a total of 18 participants showed interest in participating in the study, however, only 12 met qualifications and were used for data collection and analysis. Participants were asked to answer a thirteen-question survey that is divided into *qualifying questions*, *demographics questions* and *experience questions*. Results were analyzed in a thematic approach by highlighting similarities and differences in participants' responses. The responses showed that students do express challenges in the financial, social and emotional areas of their life by sharing descriptive examples of arrangements they have had to make in their lives to accommodate an unpaid internship, expressed emotions and shared ideas of how different ways to cope. The responses of a small sample of participants can show that there are many issues within school counseling students that are not spoken of as often as they should. School counselors have a difficult job and need to be mentally strong and stable. Future research can be done to show the relationship between the struggles of going through unpaid internship in their lives and their efficacy and quality as a counselor. Looking at it from an equitable perspective, does everyone have the same chance in making it through graduate school?

Keywords: internships, unpaid internships, mental health, wellness

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has a set of standards and requirements that are needed to succeed and achieve degree completion for counselors. One of the major requirements for school counselor student is completing a supervised practicum and internship. CACREP standards require a minimum of 100 hours of practicum completed successfully prior to 600 hours of internship (CACREP 2016. III.F.J.). Each individual program may have a greater number of hours corresponding with state licensure requirements that must be completed in the minimum timeframe of two full academic years. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), studies show that internships lead to positive outcome in career success and are an important part of application of skills (2016). Internship is a standard that is required to be met by school counselor students to apply theory and enhance counseling skills to a true population including diverse demographics (CACREP 2016, III) Aside from the program requirements students have their personal life to attend to, such as families, jobs, and other responsibilities to balance. Students often must make life arrangements to meet the required hours, especially because school counseling internships are mostly unpaid. Several qualitative studies about graduate students' experiences report challenges balancing school, work, and personal life (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Nelson, Hall, Anderson, Birtles, & Hemming, 2018; Oswalt, & Riddock, 2007; Jones, Park, & Lefevor, 2018). The literature reveals much on general information on internship benefits and some of the challenges that come along with unpaid internship in general but there is little research on the personal experiences of students in school counseling programs.

Statement of the problem

Research about school counseling internship was found and included in the literature review. Most of the research covers very specific topics or about the efficacy of internship on their professional

competence. Multiple studies reveal the importance of internship efficacy for professional development but less about the impact on personal development (Burke & Carton,2013; Smith, Mao & Deshpande, 2016; Kemer, 2017; Svacina,2012; Putman,2011;Trede, Sheehan, & McEwen, 2013; Durack,2013;Swan,2015; Mchugh,2017; HONRUBIA,2017;Sauder, Mudrick, Strassle, Maitoza, Malcarne, & Evans,2019; Binder, Baguley, Crook, & Miller,2015; Klein,& Weiss, 2011). In efforts to try to find information or research about school counseling students personal experience, very limited information was found. The research gap identified is that there is no qualitative data on how school counseling students experience unpaid internship in their personal lives. The problem is that not knowing the experiences of school counselors could mean that programs may be bypassing the personal issues that students deal with.

Purpose of the study

This study was conducted due to the lack of research on the personal experiences of school counseling students. The purpose of this study is to gather qualitative data on the impact of unpaid internship on school counseling students' personal experiences as they live it. In multiple studies, there were direct references from graduate students expressing their personal concerns related to the program requirements including unpaid internship (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Nelson, Hall, Anderson, Birtles, & Hemming, 2018; Oswald, & Riddock,2007; Jones, Park, & Lefevor,2018). The data gathered through a qualitative survey was analyzed according to the common themes present in participants' experiences as current students' whose lives are being affected regarding their completion of unpaid internships.

Significance of study

The significance is the focus on the students' personal lives and experiences and the importance of self-care and self-awareness in the counseling field. In a study done by Nelson and Colleagues they

discuss using self-compassion as a self-care. Links were found between being compassionate towards oneself. Students who use self-compassion and treat themselves with kindness rather than judgement and self-criticism tend to be healthier physically and mentally (2018.) They implemented this through counseling and found that self-compassion can help build relationships and compassion toward their clients. The significance of specifically focusing on unpaid internship at schools is because students must commit to spending day hours in schools without pay and how that can impact the students financially, socially, and emotionally (Nelson & Colleagues, 2018). The CACREP requirements of a minimum of 600 hours in two semesters will approximately require an intern to at least work one day out of the week if not more (CACREP 2016). This may be doable for traditional students but may be difficult for non-traditional student who may need to have a full time job to meet her/his financial needs (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Nelson, & colleagues, 2018; Oswalt, & Riddock, 2007; Jones, Park, & Lefevor, 2018). Examining the experience of the students in an open question manner leaves space for the student to not feel obligated to share specific information and get to choose what they are comfortable writing about.

Research questions:

1. How does unpaid internship impact school counseling students personal life?
2. In your experience, what are some coping skills, tips our resources that have been helpful as you proceed through your internship?

Definition of Terms

American School Counseling Association (ASCA). A professional organization for counselors, counseling students and related fields that presents professional development opportunities, networking and communication among school counseling in the United States.

Counseling and related Educational Programs (CACREP). Counseling accreditation that assures quality of program and continuous growth and development of the counseling program.

Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA). “establishes minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and youth employment standards affecting employees in the private sector and in Federal, State, and local governments.”- (WHD, 2018)

Fact Sheet #71. A list of guidelines created by Wage and Hour Division that are considered for a job or internship to be legally be unpaid.

Internship. This term refers to a learning experience required or highly suggested by education programs that may enhance skills specific to the interest.

Primary Beneficiary. This term is a legal term which means that the unpaid intern must benefit from the internship experience above the employer.

Unpaid Internship. This term refers to learning experience required or highly suggested to enhance skills to specific interest or career prospects that does not compensate.

CHAPTER II: Literature Review

Internships are becoming increasingly more important in higher education (Burke & Carton,2013; Smith, Mao & Deshpande, 2016; Svacina,2012; Putman,2011;Trede, Sheehan, & McEwen, 2013; Durack,2013;Swan,2015; Mchugh,2017; Honrubia,2017;Sauder, Mudrick, Strassle, Maitoza, Malcarne, & Evans,2019; Binder, Baguley, Crook, & Miller,2015; Klein,& Weiss, 2011). There is an array of school of thoughts about internships. However, there is mutual consensus that internships are an on-site learning experience for students who are exploring careers and seeking to enhance skills specific to their interest (Binder, Baguley, Crook, & Miller, 2015; Burke, & Carton, 2013; Durack, 2013;Swan, 2015; Mchugh, 2017). For counseling students, CACREP-does not state whether it will be paid or not, but it is common for students to be unpaid in the United States (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017).

Unpaid internships have been a controversial topic for decades because of the broad range of careers that require internships and the lack of legal specificity across careers (Binder, Baguley, Crook, & Miller, 2015; Burke, & Carton, 2013; Durack, 2013; Swan, 2015; Mchugh, 2017). The literature presents the benefits and challenges presented in unpaid internships. To understand unpaid internships legally, literature is presented to understand the legalities of unpaid internships. More specifically to school counseling programs, CACREP-accreditation and American School Counseling Association (ASCA) ethical standards are mentioned to emphasize the prevalence of unpaid internships for school counselor. Unpaid internships are common in the counseling field and there is not clear evidence as to the reason allowing interns to be unpaid. Some studies suggest that it may have to do with receiving college credit and it could also be the lack of funds (Binder, Baguley, Crook, & Miller, 2015; Burke, & Carton, 2013; Durack, 2013;Swan, 2015; Mchugh, 2017). Regardless of the reasons for unpaid internships the literature explores the impact on graduate students' mental health, financial concerns and reports on social and emotional issues which more closely relate the purpose of the study.

Internship Benefits

There is evidence that internships have benefits for students' professional development, higher education institutions and employers. Internship can give students a chance to try out the job they are interested in before fully committing, which in turn may also be beneficial for the employers to scope out future employees (Durack, 2013). The idea of schema related context brought up by Burke, reflects the importance of "fresh eyes" on an intern that can view things in a new way which, again can benefit the employer (2013). It was found that the internship content was not as important as the mentorship and the constant reflection and evaluation of the experience. The reflection and evaluation of the internship can even be beneficial for faculty supervisor and the program in general (McHugh, 2017; Woodsire, Ziegler, Pualaus, 2019). Getting updated information on what the current topics are in current times can be beneficial to make class material more relevant and up to date (Durack, 2013). Some things just cannot be learned in a classroom and it are important to practice in the real setting with adequate supervision (Burke & Carton, 2013). Often entry level job requires experience, which is where internships fits in making it highly competitive in some careers (Burke & Catron, 2013).

The literature stressing the internship benefits referred mostly to undergraduate internship experiences and did not have much information about the counseling field. Also, this review refers to paid and unpaid internship which have been said to have similar benefits for professional development. Currently unpaid and not having an internship at all are at the same level of getting employment (Durack, 2013). When it come to school counseling internships, most seem to be unpaid. While the reasoning for this is unclear, internships mist fit the criteria of the *Primary Beneficiary Test* and laws under the FLSA and the U.S. Wage and Hour Division (WHD, 2018). Foss and Protivnak found results indicating that counseling students deemed hands on experience in the field is crucial to apply theory into practice. Internships tend to be the norm in higher education when it comes to developing

professionally in the field of choice (Binder, Baguley, Crook, & Miller, 2015; Burke, & Carton, 2013; Durack, 2013; Swan, 2015; Mchugh, 2017). When it comes to school counseling this can be true. However, along with benefits to student, employers and higher education there may also be some challenges that come along with requiring unpaid internships. (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Nelson, Hall, Anderson, Birtles, & Hemming, 2018; Roach & Young, 2007; Oswalt, & Riddock, 2007)

Unpaid Internship: Legal and Ethical challenges

Internships can be beneficial, however there have been many questions and controversies regarding the ethical and legal ramifications of unpaid internships. Compensation is one of the biggest concerns when it comes to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), but for an internship to be unpaid they must meet certain standards as a for profit employer. When it comes to unpaid internship, The U.S Wage and Hour Division (WHD) provides *Factsheet #71* which is “provides general information to determine whether interns and students are entitled to pay under the FLSA” (WHD, 2018) . This contains the *primary beneficiary test* which helps determine if a student or an intern would be considered an employee. Once that is determined the test examines the power dynamic between the employer and the intern and make sure that the intern/student is the primary beneficiary.

Primary Beneficiary

One of the main standards is that the interns should be the *primary beneficiary*, which means that the employer does not get any direct advantages from the intern. This test identifies certain requirements that need to be followed in order to legally be an unpaid internship. The researchers of this study applied the test unofficially to CACREP by simply reading through the facts and comparing it CACREP counseling programs, which resulted in that unpaid internship for school counselors is indeed legal. The WHD *Fact Sheet #71: Factor #1*: “...intern and employer clearly understand that there is no expectation of compensation...”; *Factor #3* “...internship is tied to the intern’s formal education

program by integrated coursework or the receipt of academic credit". The key idea is that the intern receive meaningful work experience that primarily benefits their professional development. These statements are examples of how they meet the CACREP standards and seem to match school counseling internship requirements and expectations. Basically, it is insinuated that counseling internships can legally be unpaid according to the factors provided. Even though these laws may protect interns and students professionally, it does not take into consideration ethical aspects of student mental wellness and personal experiences, which are in turn important for professional efficacy in future school counselors.

Liabilities

The way that internships are set up leave room for a power differential, which can lead to more issues because students are less likely to walk away from inadequate internships especially if they are earning credit for it (Durack, 2013). Unpaid internships sometimes tend to task interns with monotonous duties rather than valuable experiences. If students are willing to work for free employers tend to go that route (Durack, 2013). Contradicting statistics show that unpaid internships found jobs quicker than those with no internship, which goes on to show that unpaid internships are better than having no internship at all. The study's consideration has to do with the likelihood of helping to find a job afterwards. However, financial, social and emotional issues should still be considered.

Paid interns basically fall under their employers' policies and can be protected but those who are unpaid may not be protected in case of a problem. Issues such as sexual harassment in the workplace can be a problem if the intern is not protected by the company's anti-harassment policy. There are also considerations with International students who tend to be taken advantage of in this field. The big takeaway is that faculty and professionals in the higher education institutions should be aware of these complications and inform students of the different effects (Svacina, 2012).

Classism

A pressing issue and the inspiration for this study is unpaid internship's connection with the enabling of classism. There is an abundance of research on this topic that show the issues of classism and discrimination within higher education. Essentially research explores the idea that unpaid internships are for those who can afford to sacrifice a stable income (Burke, & Carton, 2013; Guarise & Kostenblatt, 2018 Smith, Mao, & Deshpande, 2016; Klein, & Weiss, 2011). Classism has been added to the considerations about unpaid internship and the impact on those who are becoming school counselors. All of the following liabilities have connections to the purpose of this study to understand the variety of challenges that unpaid internships bring about and continue to understand the effects on school counseling interns in their personal experiences.

Wellness

Graduate students are said to have high rates of stress and mental health concerns (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Hyun, Quinn, Madon, Lustig, 2016; Nelson, Hall, Anderson, Birtles, & Hemming, 2018; Oswalt, & Riddock, 2007; Jones, Park, & Lefevor, 2018; White & Franzoni, 1990). ASCA ethical standards require counselors to practice self-care to avoid burnout and remain professional and healthy for their students (ASCA 2016). Self-care is talked about in many of the courses, but it is not effectively being applied into their lives and in the workplace (Nelson & colleagues, 2018). Counseling students report knowing the importance of self-care but it is often put aside due to balancing multiple roles (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Jones, Park, Nelson, Hall, Anderson, Birtles, & Hemming, 2018; Roach & Young, 2007; Oswalt, & Riddock, 2007). In a study done by Foss-Kelly and Protivnak, counselor education participants reported to have problems caring for their own wellness including health care, social activities, and spiritual interest (2017). Other themes that arise in the literature have to do with graduate students' experiences outside of school including parenting, romantic relationships and friendships. One of the common themes found in the literature that aligns with the purpose of this study

is the financial strain that a graduate counseling student undergo. Counseling students often report having to quit their jobs or being unable to have a full-time job due to the demand that internships require. (Oswalt, & Riddock, 2007; Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017). Some graduate students have more responsibilities than others and some may struggle more than others for various reasons but most students report having stress about financial issues. In the literature financial issues included tuition, cost of living and more (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Nelson, Hall, Anderson, Birtles, & Hemming, 2018; Roach & Young, 2007; Oswalt, & Riddock, 2007). In a study done by Foss-Kelly and Protivnak (2017). Students report that there are many reasons why they may have to quit their job but one of the reasons is due to the mandatory unpaid internship's requirements (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017). Some non-traditional students who have a family may not be able to quit their job which leads them to working night shifts which can be an obvious health concern (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017). These concerns can also be applied to traditional students. It can be correlated that unpaid internships lead to extra work to make ends meet which lead to stress and potential health concerns (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017). Most literature pertaining to personal experiences of counselor's life had similar themes that caused stress. However, a contradicting study by Roach & Young (2007) showed that wellness was rated higher among counselor students compared to the general population. The study goes on to find out that counseling students may be rating themselves higher in terms of understanding the importance of wellness, but results do not show how if they actually are practicing wellness skills (Roach & Young, 2007). School counselor student's mental health is important and based on the studies improvements are needed and expressed by students themselves (Roach & Young, 2007). The knowledge and understanding about practicing self-care is present but the practice is lacking. Studies show the reason may be because of barriers that prevent them from practicing skills (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017; Nelson, Hall, Anderson, Birtles, & Hemming, 2018; Roach & Young, 2007; Oswalt, & Riddock, 2007).

CHAPTER III: Method and Methodology

This qualitative study is phenomenological in nature. The purpose of phenomenological research is to “understand individuals’ life-world on a deep level to then describe that life-world as it applies to a particular experience” (Sheperis, Young & Daniels,2017). This qualitative study explores student’s personal experiences in unpaid internships as they lived them. Since the responses are subjective, phenomenological method is the most appropriate for this study (Sheperis, Young & Daniels,2017; Creswell,2018).

Participants

The researchers sought school counseling Master students currently enrolled in a CACREP program whom are currently completing their internship hours; specifically, students who are unpaid (Sheperis, & colleagues ,2017). The aim was to gather participants from all over the United States by posting a survey asking about their unpaid internship experiences on the American School Counseling Association networking site. Students that decided to answer the survey were anonymous and volunteered their time to answer the survey as they were not offered any time of compensation for their time or participation.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected by sending out a twelve-question Qualtrics Survey through the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) Networking Site along with a brief description of the study demonstrated in Appendix A. It was predicted that there would be four to six participants, however there were 18 responses in a seven-day week period. The participants were led to the survey by clicking on the link available in a post in the ASCA Networking Site which guaranteed the respondents anonymity.

Prior to taking the survey, participants were prompted to read and electronically sign the informed consent identified in Appendix B. The informed consent briefed the participant on the purpose of the study, risk, benefits and contact information if any concerns or questions should arise. If consent is given, the participant moved on to the next four questions, considered *qualifying questions*. If the participants qualify they move on to the *demographic questions* and *the experience questions* on the survey.

Qualifying questions

To assure that the participants fall under the population being studied they had to answer “yes” to the first three questions. For the fourth question “unpaid” must be selected in order for the participant to qualify for the study and move on to the next questions. 1) Are you currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited School Counseling Program? 2) Are you enrolled in the school counseling track? 3) Are you currently completing practicum or internship hours? 4) Is your internship unpaid (monetary reimbursement)?

If any of the responses were “no” and/or if they selected paid versus unpaid on questions question 4, they were directed to a screen that will politely thank them for their participation and let them know that they do not meet the criteria for study. The four qualifying questions determined that the participants are in a CACREP-accredited program in the school counseling track and are currently completing their internship hours unpaid.

Demographic questions

If participants qualify for the study, they will move on to the demographic questions. Questions 5-8 are demographic questions that may be significant in data interpretation. Questions 5 and 6 asked their gender and age. Gender is asked to identify disproportionately high number of one gender that

should be analyzed. In attempt to be inclusive, a gender question will give the participants the option of identifying as woman, man, genderqueer/non-binary or fill in the blank. Their age could be significant in interpreting results by developmental stage. The question about their age is asked in a fill in the blank manner and later will be grouped and classified by researcher. Question 7 asked for region or location in which they reside following the ACES region model including: North Central: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin; North Atlantic: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, DC. Puerto Rico or Virgin Islands; Southern: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, or West Virginia; Rocky Mountain: Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico; Western: Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, or Pacific Rim countries. Question eight asked about ethnicity and race to keep track of any disproportions in any one race or ethnicity that may be included in limitations.

Experience Questions

Questions 9-12 are the core questions that correspond with the study's research questions. Question 9 asks about their experience financially in relation to participating in an unpaid internship. Question 10 is worded similarly to question nine but asked about their social experience. Question 11 is also like question nine and ten but asked about the emotional experience. Questions 9-11 focus on the participant's personal experience through their perspective. Question 12 is a remedial question to explore any coping skills, tips and resources that the participants use to manage impact of unpaid internship. A copy of the survey questions will be provided on Appendix C.

Data Analysis

In attempt to follow the phenomenological approach methods, the researchers read through the experience questions thoroughly three times, coded by horizontalization and analyzed significant statements describing the participants' experiences to identify meaningful themes (Creswell, 2018). The themes found in the data are used to understand the experiences of students in CACREP school counseling programs that have been impacted by their unpaid internship experience in their personal lives. The purpose of the gathered data is to learn about the experiences as the participants view it in a descriptive way (Creswell, 2018). The survey used for data collection was preemptively sectioned into *qualifying questions*, *demographic questions* and *content questions*. *Qualifying questions* and *demographic questions* are not part of the theme analysis due to the small sample of students. However, they are still part of the entirety of the study. These questions are there for the purpose of narrowing the population to the needs of the study and to showcase the demographics represented in the study.

Experience questions

The experience questions correspond directly to the purpose of the study; understanding the participants' experiences. Each of the content questions focus on a different category that have to do with the impact on their 1) *financial*, 2) *social* and 3) *emotional experience* and to add, 4) *coping skills* that have been beneficial during the duration of their unpaid internship. The participants answers were pooled together and analyzed by highlighting key words and phrases to identify themes. After analyzing them separately, questions were analyzed and compared as a whole to find connections among the four questions as well as any relevant connections to demographic questions.

Trustworthiness

Bracketing is part of data analysis due to the researcher's close relation to the topic. Bracketing is when researchers interest, views and personal experience could potentially influence the way that data

is interpreted (Fischer,2009). The self- disclosure serves as a reminder of the importance and reality of researcher engagement in qualitative research about human experiences (Fischer, 2009). In order to increase credibility to the study, *peer debriefing* will be incorporated in the data analysis by having the committee partake in reviewing the data analysis (Creswell,2018).

Using phenomenological data is not an excuse to reveal personal experiences (Sousa,2014). However, the researcher will bracket and disclose the connection to the study to bring awareness about the potential bias (Sousa,2014). The extensive literature review and access to members of the thesis committee show consistency with this study and others. Tufford and Newman research on bracketing methods, suggest that biases in qualitative research is natural and can also be beneficial. Preconceived biases can create adverse effects to the study results; however, it can also encourage meaningful reflection on the topic which can lead to more profound results (2010). There are many ways of bracketing in research, but for the purposes of this study the researcher reflected any personal biases in a reflexive journal that underlies personal interest in the study's topic. Journaling included keeping track of feeling and thoughts about the study of continuously researching for more data and being aware of personal biases. To assure minimal two of the committee members reviewing this thesis come from different non-counseling backgrounds which demonstrate the importance to assure that results are interpreted honestly and thoroughly. The literature presented backs up the researchers' biased beliefs and attitudes about unpaid internship which demonstrates the potential of the student's attitudes and beliefs to be human experience that is pertinent in qualitative research.

One of the fellow researchers in this study is a student that meets the exact criteria of the students being recruited and interviewed in the study. The research portrayed has been inspired by personal experience of the researcher as they have gone through unpaid internship. This disclosure as someone who may have natural biases provides an opportunity to validate the study. There are three other

committee members involved in the thesis that will be aware and ensure the bias that may be portrayed throughout the thesis. In addition, the efforts through the literature presented backs up the researchers biased beliefs and attitudes about unpaid internship which demonstrates the potential of the student's attitudes and beliefs to be human experience that is pertinent in qualitative research.

Following the data analysis, connections and results were made, as well as limitations and implications for future research. This study has not been done before and is intended to be a start to collecting information on school counseling students' experiences in the program. This study is mostly geared towards unpaid internship experiences, which is only a part of the experiences that school counseling students face through the length of their program. This data has been collected and analyzed following IRB protocols.

CHAPTER IV: Results

The purpose of this survey is to showcase the students experience in relation to their unpaid school counseling internship. The survey for this study yielded 18 responses, out of which 12 were used in the data analysis. Reasons for excluding certain participants were due to not meeting the qualifications of the studies. Four participants were not in CACREP accredited program. One participant was paid for their internship and one participant did not answer any of the experience questions which are essential for the results and outcome of the study. Of the remaining twelve, 100% of them were presently in a CACREP school counseling program and currently in an unpaid internship.

Demographics

Participants in this study all identified as women. Ethnically, 50% (6) of participants were White. Asian, Black and Hispanic/Latino ethnicities yielded evenly at 16.67% (2). The ages ranged from 26 to 40. The average age was 28.1 and the most common age was 28. As far as locations are concerned, Northern Central region including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin yielded evenly at 33.33% (4) with the Southern Region which includes Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, or West Virginia yielded at 25%. Western Region Western including Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, or Pacific Rim countries yielded at 8.33%. There were no participants from the Rocky Mountain region.

Data Analysis

The data was examined for patterns and themes by going through each individual answer under each category: financial, social, emotional and coping skills. The responses were reviewed three times by the main researcher to identify meaningful themes. Mention of finances, money or bills were

highlighted green throughout the categories. Any examples of job, schedule or life arrangements, as well as any resources were highlighted yellow. Any emotional impact or terms used to describe how they were impacted were highlighted blue. Unique and situational examples were highlighted pink. Mentions of positive self-talk, self-care, mindfulness were highlighted teal. Impressionable remarks were underlined and if they disclosed that there was no impact those were highlighted grey. From the highlighted material five total themes were found throughout the experience questions: *Income decrease, schedule conflict, positive thinking, support system and self-care.*

Question 1: How does having and unpaid internship impact you financially?

This question asked participants to reflect and share their financial experience due to unpaid internship. The majority of the participants went into descriptive detail of their experience which was not required of them. The idea behind this question is to show that finance is indeed an issue among school counseling students. One way or another, all participants shared how unpaid internship impacts them financially. All but one participant went into detail about their experience. In analyzing the data having an unpaid internship does negatively impact students financially, but two overarching themes encompass a majority of the responses to this question: *decreased income and schedule conflicts*

Decreased income

Having to accommodate unpaid internship forces students to take a decrease in income. For some of the participants the results were drastic, where they went from full-time job to low paying part-time jobs. One student even mentioned needing assistance from food pantries or that they barely have enough money to live. For others it means having to make changes to their expenses and budget to make ends meet. Two participants mention taking out loans, which can be considered a decrease in income since it is debt that has to be paid off in the future. As one of the participants said, "I will joke with

people that any money in my bank account I don't actually own because I have a decent amount of student loans.”

Schedule conflict

A pressing issue that needs to be address when talking about the financial impact of being in unpaid internships is the balancing schedules between internship, jobs, classes and life. Many of the responses included mention of conflicting schedules. Since school hours are typically between 8AM-4PM, getting hours during that time in internship and simultaneously trying to do paid work can be a challenge. Student wrote about having to quit their full-time job and get a part time job to accommodate their internship hours during the day. Several participants mentioned that it is difficult to find a job in the evening, or a job that will just hire them on weekends. One participant expressed, “no place wants to hire someone who is only available on Saturday and Sundays.”

To put these results into perspective, many of these participants had different life situations such as, being a single mother, primary “bread-winner”, part-time student, unemployed, living on their own, and already paying back loans. These examples show the variety of different situational scenarios that students might be in the midst of completing their internship hours.

Question 2: How does having an unpaid internship impact your social life?

This question was aimed at understanding the experiences that an unpaid internship has on participants' social life. Social life was not defined for participants but many of them define it as spending time with friends and family. The two themes discovered in question one about financial impact were also found in their social impact, however social life does not seem to have as drastic of an impact as finances have. About 42% (5) mentioned that unpaid internship does not really have an impact on their social life in any significant way. A third theme was identified in the responses to this question: *positive thinking*

Decreased Income

Approximately 33% (4) of participants mentioned finances or lack of money to be an issue when socializing: “no money to socialize”. Participants stated, “I don’t have the freedom to go out to dinner, grab a cup of coffee, or go to a movie...”. A contradicting example showed that one participant thought that her social life was not as impacted because her and her friends try not to spend money together and find a way to meet up anyway. Either way, this student still mentioned lack of money as an issue that could affect social life but just not in her situation.

Schedule conflict

Others stated that lack of time in balancing their job and internship makes it difficult to have a social life.

Some participants also mentioned how going to class and needing time for assignments can also make it difficult to find time to socialize. One participant that talked about not having an impact on their social life still mentioned that “if I wasn’t at my internship site, I would otherwise be at work on the same days at the same times.” This response brought to light the idea that lack of time and conflict of schedules may happen whether internship is paid or unpaid. Around 33% (4) of participants mentioned that most of their time is spent working or at internship. These responses also may vary depending on the student’s personal situation.

Positive thinking

A couple participants took a positive turn and reframed the way that they look at the social impact on their life. One participant wrote, “I am okay with it as I am loving my internship experience and my colleagues.” Another participant mentioned how she uses this opportunity to teach her students

about unpaid internships. Starting from this question on, the amount of positivity statements in the responses start to increase.

Question 3: How does having an unpaid internship impact you emotionally?

Participants were not asked to tell how they feel emotionally until this question, however words describing emotions have been apparent throughout all the questions. Many of the participants used emotions or descriptive words to express how they are feeling. About 67% of the participants mentioned the word “stress” in their responses. One person stated that it had no impact emotionally. The themes identified throughout the responses were also identified in this question: *decreased income*, *schedule conflict*, and *positive thinking*. The same 67% of the students mentioned that their stress is coming from either finances or job schedules.

Decreased income

Decreased income, from job loss or downgrading to part-time work evidently brought up emotions which can have effects on mental health. Out of all the participants 50% (6) talked about their emotions referring to their finances and debt. Participants used statements such as “financially stressed”; “extreme stress because of financial status and debt”. One participant stated, “it has been rough... dealing with students who are emotionally draining and then realizing that I may be short on a bill payment...” This statement specifically defines that relationship between the job as a counselor and the personal stress of having to survive.

Schedule conflict

Only 16% (2) mentioned emotions regarding their schedule. These two participants spoke of stress related completing the required internship hours and having to balance multiple jobs to accommodate their internship. Even though schedule conflict does not come up as much when talking

about emotions, it is still present in the responses. Many of the participants speak positively about their experience despite it being stressful.

Positive thinking

When asked about emotions, 41.67% (5) of participants also mentioned something positive about their experience. One participant said, “I do great learning at my site and don’t mind that my internship is unpaid.” Another said, “I am getting extra support working with a counselor every day.”; “I am enjoying the experience and I am lucky that I secured a wonderful site.” Others talk about self-care and explain that even though the job is exhausting, it is also exciting.

When it comes reflecting on emotions only two of the students spoke of the work that they deal with as counselors. For example, one participant talked about getting “sucked into the politics and divisiveness of my current site.” or “dealing with students who are emotionally draining”. Most of the others talked about their experience with finances and managing many responsibilities in their personal life at once as well as reflecting on the positive side of internship.

Question 4: In your experience, what are some coping skills, tips or resources that have been helpful for you to proceed through your internship?

Most participants had already showed signs of positivity throughout their responses, but this question gave them a chance to reflect and share some of the coping skills and tips that they have used and have found to be helpful throughout their internship experience. Three overall themes were identified that pertained to the positive nature of the question: *Positive thinking, support system and self-care.*

Positive Thinking

When asked about coping skills or tips 50% (6) mentioned an example of positive thinking. Some examples focus on the future: “I just keep on swimming knowing that my hours are slowly but

surely accumulating”; “reminding myself that I will get through it, I will hopefully have a job after graduation.” Others write about reminding themselves why they are here and taking one step at a time.

Support System

About 75% (9) of responses mentioned having a support system which include family friends, classmates, professors, supervisors and seeing personal counselor. Some of the examples that fit under this theme are “being able to debrief and process with another person, especially other students in my cohort.” Comments about what support system means to them were also identified such as “if I didn’t have mine[support system] I don’t know if I would have been able to finish my program.”

Self-care

Positive thinking and having a support system can be part of self-care. However, around 58% (7) of response gave specific ideas of self-care that can be done in daily life such as exercise, meal prepping, mindfulness apps, bubble baths and masks as well as “retail therapy”. These were examples of activities that these participants currently use as a means to help them throughout unpaid internship.

Essence of the phenomenon

The impact of unpaid internship on school counseling students is financial, mentally stress, and exhaustion. Having to make drastic arrangements to their lives to be able to accommodate an unpaid internship while being expected to provide for themselves and their families can be concerning professionally and in terms of their mental health. Having high amounts of stress and worrying about finances and scheduling while dealing with highly emotional and stressful during the day contradicts the ASCA standards of mental wellbeing which is required to provide appropriate care for students at the schools (ASCA 2016). Students in the study were open to explain their stress, almost like venting their emotions and frustrations. Even though some students did not say that they felt impacted in any significant way, most students had at least one example of how being in an unpaid internship affects

their lives. Even though participants described difficult financial and life situations most were resilient and knew the importance of practicing self-compassion and self-care. There are no formal warnings on ASCA or CACREP requirements about having to do unpaid internship and the immense impact that it can have on students' mental health. Even at the legal level, there are no certainties when it comes to unpaid internship. The goal overall would be to change the system and have paid internships for school counseling students, however because of the complicated legal and political issues it seems fair to at least improve awareness in counseling programs. Having more conversations on the topic, as well as advocating for more scholarships and financial and mental health support for those who may need it the most are some crucial first steps that can be taken to help school counseling students.

There were 12 participants that were part of this study and each of their responses were analyzed separately and collectively. It was not expected to have twelve participants however, the predicted yield was much lesser due to the nature, and mode of collecting the data. Most of the responses were thorough, where participants gave context and explained their personal experience. The study results indicate that students have opinions regarding their unpaid internship and its effects on their personal lives, regardless if it is a positive or negative. The fact is that school counseling students in internship do have elevated amounts of stress and have to sometimes make drastic arrangements in their lifestyle to accommodate their unpaid internship.

CHAPTER V: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of unpaid internship on the personal lives of school counseling students. According to Foss and Kelly's study, students showed the impact of financial, emotional and social aspects of their lives that graduate school may have on them (2017). For this study, the same areas were explored but with special focus on financial, social and emotional impacts of unpaid internships. The goal was to better understand the experiences of the students in CACREP school counseling programs who were currently experiencing the effects of unpaid internship.

There were 12 participants in the study who were currently in a CACREP accredited program in the school counseling track. There were six responses that were removed from the study. The participants completed a survey that asked them about their experiences. These experiences were broken down into, financial, emotional, social impact as well as a remedial question that asked about coping skills. The data was analyzed using phenomenological research demonstrating that students are impacted by unpaid internship financially, socially and emotionally. The most prominent responses had to do with financial concerns showing that students are going through drastic financial changes because of unpaid internship that is concerning for their mental health. More specifically, it is important to understand the effect that high stress and mental health concerns can have on professionals that are required to provide mental health services.

The following section includes discussion of the results found in this study. The discussion includes the research questions, connection to previous research and limitations.

Research Question One: How does unpaid internship impact school counseling student's personal life?

This question encompasses all of the experience questioned asked in the study; financial, social and emotional. The study showed that all participants had some sort of impact from at least one out of

the three aspects of their lives, if not all of them. Through analyzing the responses, important themes were identified that demonstrate the importance of this study. An interesting, but not surprising find is how finances were a prominent and recurring theme in all three questions. The financial questions brought up a variety of issues from the participants, but it did not stop there. When asked about social life, the topic of not having enough money to socialize came up, or not having enough time because of trying to work to make money. When asked about emotional impact many brought up stress about finances and felt like they are constantly worrying about it.

Financial

The two themes that came up when asked about financial impact were *decreased income* and *schedule conflict*. An important note on this is the decrease of income can be related to the schedule conflict. If students were paid for their internship, that are typically during the day, they may not have to worry as much about balancing multiple jobs in the evening or on the weekends. It is known that graduate students express financial concern and stress, but why does it seem like there is not much being done about it (Foss-Kelly, & Protivnak, 2017)? Legally not getting paid for an internship is ambiguous. According to *Fact Sheet #71*, students should be aware if their internships are paid or unpaid and that internships should primarily benefit the students. (WHD, 2018). Unfortunately, these “facts” are difficult to measure and even if the student did not initially know that it was unpaid, or doesn’t agree with the fact that its unpaid, there are no other options encouraging student to opt out of being in the program.

Social

Social life is an important aspect of a person’s life. A study done by Foss-Kelly and Protivnak, showed that graduate student in the mental health field had reported issues socially, including family, friends or romantic relationships. Meaning that families or friends may not understand that being in graduate school requires a lot of time and effort which may mean less time with family. Financially,

student also reported issues with spouses or relationship because of the decrease in pay (2017). Unlike Foss- Kelly & Protvinak's study, this thesis showed that participants were not impacted as severely, however, everyone seemed to agree that in order to socialize, they need to spend some money. There could be more in-depth research about the social impact on counseling students, however, knowing that there are high rates of stress in students' social lives, school counseling programs can more intentionally incorporate conversations and tips on this topic.

Emotional

The purpose of understanding the emotional aspect of the participants' lives is to get a better understanding of the mental health of the participants. Counselors mental health is highly important (Foss-Kelly & Protivnak, 2017, ASCA 2016). Having high amounts of stress about finances and worrying about paying bills can make it very difficult to focus on other people. Without asking the question it is evident that unpaid internship is stressful. Many participants used words that described emotions relating or similar to the word "stress". In response to this question, participants once again, brought up stress related to financial impact or schedule conflict. However, in an interesting turn of events more of the participants started adding a positive twist to show that even though unpaid internship can be stressful it is a good experience. This reaction to the question could be due to a variety of reasons, but either way it shows that many of these participants show resilience and hope in the midst of stress.

Research Question Two: In your experience, what are some coping skills, tips or resources that have been helpful as you proceed through your internship

This question is significant to the study in understanding how the participants in the study are acting toward the impact of the unpaid internship. ASCA standards and CACREP requirements stress

the importance of self-care for student mental health while being able to provide quality service in the field. Even though it was clear that many of the participants were stressed out and had a negative experience, many of them also were able to turn it into something positive by using positive self-talk and reminding themselves that the stress of being unpaid is temporary. By using this positive self-talk they are unknowingly practicing self-compassion. Understanding that they need to take some time for themselves or practicing self-care to be able to do their job adequately (Nelson & colleagues 2018). One theme that stood out in these responses was having a *support system*. This can be tied to the social impact question; demonstrating that support from family, friends, peers and professionals is important to students. Just the fact that students recognize support system as important demonstrates self-compassion. Practicing self-compassion during the counseling program and after can be a useful skill that can help students grow and learn as a counseling professional.

The best practices assigned by the National Society of Experiential Education are *authenticity, reflection, monitoring, improvement, as well as assessment and evaluation* (Burke & Carton, 2013). These best practices resemble the school counseling internship requirements taken from CACREP-accreditation, which shows that the internship program is very intentional about the effectiveness of the students' internship experiences. Literature regarding the subject shows that supervision from a profession mentor and constant reflection is crucial and can be helpful in dealing with some of the prominent issues persistent with unpaid internships. However, it does not address the impact on student's personal lives. Durack proposes solutions to help support students through the use of Federal Work Duty program or grant funds (2013). Other proposed solutions, advocates for interns to be paid. Although literature agrees that unpaid internships should be paid, it is a multidimensional effort followed by systemic change that has been in the works for decades and may take more time. Future research is recommended to continue the efforts in understanding the effects of unpaid internship on

school counselors, meanwhile counseling program can implement change in their curriculum to provide more conversation about unpaid internship impact.

Future Research

This study was inspired by a larger vision of understanding the relationship between classism and the requirements of unpaid internship in school counseling programs. Choosing to enter a program where internships are unpaid yet required speaks volumes about privilege and classism in higher education and counseling career. Research expresses criticism on how unpaid internship is for those who can afford to sacrifice a stable income (Burke, & Carton, ,2013; Guarise & Kostenblatt, 2018 Smith, Mao, & Deshpande, 2016; Klein, & Weiss, 2011). Drawing from this thesis and knowing that unpaid internship impacts students, it would be interesting to know how unpaid internship impacts their multicultural competency based on the demographics of the students. Future research is recommended to further analyze demographics and socioeconomic status of students compared to their reaction to experiences in unpaid internship and its effects. Based on the findings of this study, research with different variable is highly recommended to further learn about the effects of unpaid internships on students, multicultural competencies classism, and privilege.

Limitations

The largest limitation in the study is the lack of research on school counselor specifically. The topic is very narrow and could potentially be the reason for lacking research. Due to the nature of the topic adjacent research was read and analyzed to fit the topic. References on internship focused mostly on general internships and their benefits. Similar limitations apply to research on school counseling student's mental health or wellness. Due to researcher preference, only master students will be included in the study. A more comprehensive study could include students and school counselors of various years of experiences to view their effects of internship in a different way. More demographics could be

included and compared with the answers to the questions. Alternative research could be done ideally with mixed methods where questions require a scaling answer and a written answer.

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APPENDIX A: Survey Brief Statement

Hello Everyone!

ARE YOU CURRENTLY COMPLETING YOUR INTERNSHIP?

Please click this [Survey](#) to help a fellow school-counselor-to-be on her thesis! Or click the link below.

I want to know your experience as you complete your internship. This is the time for you to express and reflect on how your internship experience has impacted you personally.

THANK YOU

Please contact me at eggutma@mnstate.edu with any questions or concerns about this study.

https://mnstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_1Txbu28SoLbI7hH

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent

Title of Study: Exploring school counseling students' unpaid internship experiences in their personal lives

Purpose of the study: To gather and analyze qualitative data on the experiences that graduate students are experiencing in their personal lives, particularly in relation to their unpaid internships

What you will do in this study: Using an online survey you will be asked to complete a questionnaire with five questions related to your experience as a school counseling intern.

Time required: The survey will take anywhere from 10-30 minutes to complete depending on the length of your responses.

Risks: the risk associated with this study include emotional discomfort related to the experiences that may be reminders of current hardship or past hardship in your personal life.

Benefits: You will be contributing to understanding the experience of current school counseling students going through an internship. There is limited research on school counseling students but there is less on their personal experiences.

Confidentiality: Your participation in this experiment will remain confidential and your identity will not be stored with your data. The delivery of this questionnaire will be anonymous and there are no leading questions that would identify the participant.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation into experiment is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any given time at no cost. You can withdraw by sampling exiting the questionnaire. You May contact the co-investigator at eggumta@mnstate.edu to have questionnaire withdrawn.

Contact

Dr. Taryn Akgul, taryn.akgul@mnstate.edu, 218-477-2297 or Tatiana Eggum, eggumta@mnstate.edu

If you feel any discomfort or adverse effects from participating in the study please contact your university counseling center or call 211 or visit 211.org to find available counseling resources.

Whom to contact about your rights in this experiment:

Dr. Lisa I. karch, Chair of MSUM Institutional Research Board, at Irb@mnstate.edu or 218-477-2699

Agreement:

The purpose and nature of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time.

In signing this agreement, I also affirm that I am at least 18 years of age or older

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print) _____

APPENDIX C: Survey

Section I: Qualifying questions

1. Are you currently enrolled in a CACREP-accredited School Counseling Program?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Are you enrolled in the school counseling track?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Are you currently completing practicum or internship hours?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Is your internship unpaid (monetary reimbursement)?
 - a. Unpaid
 - b. Paid

Section II: Demographics

5. Please indicate your gender
 - a. Woman
 - b. Man
 - c. Genderqueer/nonbinary
 - d. _____ (fill in the blank)
6. What is your ethnicity
 - a. Asian
 - b. White
 - c. African American/ black
 - d. Native American or Native Alaskan
 - e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - f. Middle Eastern or North African
 - g. Hispanic, Latinx or Spanish
 - h. _____ (fill in the blank)
7. What is your age?
8. Region you reside in:
 - a. North Central: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Wisconsin.
 - b. North Atlantic: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, DC. Puerto Rico or Virgin Islands.

- c. Southern: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, or West Virginia
- d. Rocky Mountain: Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico
- e. West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, or Pacific Rim countries.

9. Race and ethnicity

- a. Asian
- b. White
- c. African American/ black
- d. Native American or Native Alaskan
- e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- f. Middle Eastern or North African
- g. Hispanic, Latinx or Spanish
- h. _____ (fill in the blank)

Section III: Views on experiences in

- 10. How does having an unpaid internship impact you financially?
- 11. How does having an unpaid internship impact your social life?
- 12. How does having an unpaid internship impact you emotionally?
- 13. In your experience, what are some coping skills, tips or resources that have been helpful for you to proceed through your internship?

APPENDIX D: Debriefing Form

Title of Study: Exploring unpaid internship impact on school counseling students' personal life.

We appreciate your participation in this study. Thank you for your time and consideration that will be an addition to the literature in the field of school counseling.

The purpose of the study is to gather and analyze qualitative data on the experiences that graduate students are experiencing in their personal lives, particularly in relation to their unpaid internships

If you wish to withdraw from the study, have any questions or would like a summary report of the research when it is completed please contact Tatiana Eggum, eggumta@msntate.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights during this study please contact Lisa I. Karch, Chair of MSUM Institutional Research Board, lisa.karch@mnstate.edu.

If you feel that you are experiencing adverse consequences from this study including emotional discomfort please contact your university's counseling services, call 2-1-1, or visit 211.org.

All research data for this study will be deidentified and only portrayed in professional documents.

Again, Thank you for your participation,

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