

Best Practices: The Dalhousie University Career Counselling Internship Programmet

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Abstract

The Dalhousie University Career Counselling Internship Programme was established in 1987 to provide specialist training in Career Counselling. The Internship is a full-time, 10 month, post- master's programme of supervised work and study. Of the 24 participants who have completed the Internship, 13 were School Counsellors on leave from their School Boards and 11 were Professional Counsellors, Social Workers, and Psychologists who came without institutional sponsorship. This article describes the major components of the Internship the: history; purpose; admission process; programme goals; objectives; and program content. This article also critically reviews evaluations of the Internship, the impact the training has had on the Interns' personal development and professional practice, and the reciprocal benefits.

History

The 1980s brought a time of economic recession and rapid advances in information technology. Problems people had looking for work, and the burgeoning of career options related to computer science, were concerns which were frequently addressed in the media. There was also a strong media emphasis which questioned the value of post-secondary education and its application to work. Perhaps because of the pressures these changes created, and the attention given to them by the media, there was a significant increase in the demand for career counselling services at Dalhousie University (Dal News, 1987, p.1-2). Despite this demand, there was a scarcity of counsellors with career counselling expertise and a growing awareness that there were no opportunities for this specialty training available in Nova Scotia. Indeed, in spite of the need for career counselling training, the few universities in Canada which provided

graduate course work in counselling limited their offerings to introductory theoretical courses and did not offer applied career counselling courses.

In 1987, with the endorsement of the provincial Education and Social Services Ministers, the Counselling Foundation of Canada supported the creation of the Dalhousie University Career Counselling Internship Programme. This full-time, ten-month programme of work and study is the only continuing education career counselling opportunity available to counsellors in Nova Scotia, and it is the only program of its kind in Canada.

Purpose

Building on the basic training provided by graduate programs with courses in counselling and career development, the Dalhousie University Career Counselling Internship Programme provides advanced training and supervision designed to support the development of a career counselling specialty. As the Interns learn how to enhance their knowledge and skills, they work with the career counselling staff and clients of Dalhousie University.

Participants

Over the last 19 years, a total of 24 Interns completed the Internship Programme. Thirteen of the Interns were School Counsellors (MED. Counselling) who had been awarded educational leaves from their School Boards. The remaining interns, who came without institutional support, included: 3 (MSc.) Clinical and Educational Psychologists; 4 (MSW) Social Workers; and 4 (MED. Counselling) Professional Counsellors. In addition, the programme has accommodated graduate level career counselling practicum students and undergraduate level volunteer Career Information Assistants who, on occa-

sion, learn under the supervision of the Interns.

Admission and Selection of Interns

Requirements

Applicants who are selected for the Internship are experienced professionals with a minimum of a Master's degree in Counselling, Psychology or Social Work. Applicants must also demonstrate an interest in and capacity for independent study, and typically have a history of professional leadership. Priority is given to applicants who have a combination of experience, motivation and expertise in counselling.

Application Procedure

The Internship application procedure is a competitive process for the candidates. The candidates must submit a letter of intent and a resume, and be prepared to discuss their applied research interests during a selection interview. The applicant must also identify referees who can discuss the quality of their work, ethical behavior, counselling skills, interest in the area of career development and their suitability for the Internship. Applicants who are School Counsellors must also apply for a ten-month educational leave from their School Board.

Selection Process

During the interview, applicants are questioned about their counselling styles, theoretical orientation, comfort level with training and supervision, knowledge of both the theory and practice of career counselling, (especially the issues that impact on career choice and development), and their personal and professional goals and expectations of the programme. The selection criteria are designed to assess the candidates' counselling expertise, motivation, enthusiasm, professional presentation,

and suitability. Also closely examined is their preparedness to put themselves in the role of a student: to have their skills closely examined; to have their individual caseloads closely monitored; to be willing to risk being vulnerable under observation while demonstrating new skills and advanced techniques; to be motivated to conduct research; as well as to examine, at length, the complexity of counselling as it relates to career development.

Goals and Objectives

The Internship is designed to guide the Intern's examination of the field of career choice and development, as well as to provide opportunities for in-depth study in areas of personal interest. Clearly defined goals and objectives are presented as modules which include: the theoretical context for counselling; individual career counselling; psychological testing; the role of career information with special emphasis on the on-site Frank G. Lawson Career Information Center; portfolio development; and employment counselling. The applied research project and the academic advising module objectives and timelines are created based on the needs of each Intern and the communities they serve. Special modules are also available (as time, interest, and resources permit), for learning how to deliver peer counselling and mentoring programming. These modules are often worked on simultaneously, but the criteria for measuring the mastery of these goals are stated sequentially as learning objectives. This allows the Interns to have a concrete sense of the Internship Programme's timing and pacing, as well as an awareness of their individual progress.

Firmly grounded in classic and current career development theory, models and practices, these modules outline the systematic examination of career development theories and career counselling practices. As the goals of the Internship and those of each Intern are integrated with priorities, objectives and timelines the emphasis of the programme content is negotiated and tailored to the Intern's personal and professional needs.

Programme Content

Theoretical Context

The areas of study imbedded in the Internship include the examination of career development theories and their impact on career counselling research and practice. Having already been introduced to these theories in their graduate programs, Interns are expected to apply these theories to their caseloads and research projects. They are expected to initiate daily discussions and weekly seminars designed to reveal and extend their ability to apply theoretical knowledge to their counselling practice and research projects.

The strong academic focus of the Internship was recognized by Dalhousie University's former School of Education. Before Dalhousie's School of Education was closed, Interns could also simultaneously enroll in the Educational Psychology program and receive graduate level course credit for the readings, project, and practicum components of the Internship.

Career Counselling

The intensive supervised counselling experience is an integral daily component of the Internship. In spite of the language typically used to describe career issues, research and practical experience reveals the very personal concerns that people bring to career counselling. Interns quickly learn that career counselling interventions must also address a number of common client concerns including: self-confidence, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, learning disabilities, mental health, as well as issues related to sexual orientation, family and multicultural issues. Interns must also be prepared to work effectively with a variety of populations and special issues. Frequent topics of study and discussion include those that are unique to women, men and dual careers as well as those concerns that parents and children bring to careers issues. Through readings, discussions and consultations with local experts, Interns deepen their understanding of complex nature of career issues as well as their ability to design interventions which address these concerns.

The training model of supervision typically flows on a cycle of: assigned

readings and discussions; observation of supervisor with clients and debriefing; supervisor observation of Intern and debriefing; independent work supported with supervisor on-call; and, finally, on-going case and practice issues consultation.

Psychological testing

Psychological testing and assessment is an important component of a career counselling practice. It is understood that Interns have already studied the fundamentals of test construction and surveyed a variety of assessments in their graduate programs. In the course of the Internship they are expected to be able to independently administer, interpret, analyze and critique a variety of instruments and interventions. The assessments most commonly used during their Internship include the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) and the Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI). Other forms of assessment are also studied, critiqued and utilized with clients such as Card Sorts and Self-Report checklists.

Career Information

With the unique availability of an on-site Career Information Specialist and the substantive Frank G. Lawson Career Information Centre, Interns can develop expertise in print and web based career information management. As clients, faculty and staff demand a high level of career counselling proficiency, the Interns conduct intense research, consultation and study of the Lawson Career Information Centre model of service delivery. They may then return to their own institutions and develop or enhance their own career information centers, and become better prepared to act as consultants for their colleagues.

Career Portfolio

The career portfolio design and development module is addressed through readings, consultation, workshops and the construction of a personal career portfolio. Interns are expected to reflect upon their own career development issues and the portfolio is used as the vehicle to examine and extend their own professional development goals.

Employment counselling

Special issues and strategies in employment counselling are also examined. This field is studied in response to client needs in caseloads that can range from a young person having just graduated from high school, to a mature student returning to higher learning, to a graduate student completing a Ph.D. program. Interns examine the most current employment practices as well as the psychological barriers that clients experience as they progress in their search for meaningful employment. Each Intern is expected to systematically design interventions to help clients cope with the pressures of presenting oneself as a professional, as well as how to deal with the special issues that come with success, rejection or loss.

Applied research

The applied research project is primarily designed to meet the needs of the Interns' clients and colleagues at their sponsoring institutions. When Interns enter the programme without institutional sponsorship, their projects are most often designed to help them to foster expertise in the particular areas they would like to serve. Simultaneously, Interns initiate a complementary independent study, consisting of a literature review and consultation with experts in the field. The projects the Interns have conducted are as varied as their interests and have ranged from piloting career infusion in junior and senior high schools, examining narrative therapy and how it is applied to career counselling, surveying educational opportunities in Nova Scotia, surveying Nova Scotia Guidance Counsellors about their practices, and designing and piloting interventions for special populations.

Professional Development

In addition to the professional development that is an on-going component of the Internship, learning opportunities also occur in meetings which are designed to share information and to promote the skill development of all Counselling Centre staff. Expertise is acquired as Interns learn how to serve identified career development needs within a variety of professions through

consultations with university faculty, departments and professional programmes as well as responding, on occasion, to requests from local schools. Interns are also encouraged to attend local career development workshops, as these become available, and to participate at national conferences.

Evaluation

A key component of the Internship is the intense individual supervision provided for each candidate. To qualify for a Certificate of Completion, Interns enroll from September until the end of June and are assessed as having successfully passed only when they have met the goals and objectives of each module of the Internship. The criteria upon which the Intern is evaluated encompasses professional competence (including therapeutic knowledge, skills, ethical and professional behavior, case conceptualization and intervention skills, professional knowledge and judgment, and standards of practice) and personal growth and development (including critical self-analysis, self-directedness, independence, motivation and enthusiasm).

Daily on-going verbal feedback constitutes a substantial portion of the Intern's evaluation. This assessment, which occurs immediately after direct supervision and consultation, allows for repertoire development, direct teaching and targeted skill enhancement. To ensure that the Intern's progress remains within the negotiated timelines, written evaluations of the Intern and their progress within each module are conducted mid-term by the supervisor.

In addition, whenever Interns conduct career development workshops for students, written evaluative feedback is immediately requested from workshop participants. These surveys reveal client ratings, on a Likert Scale, of the Intern's ability to present new ideas, approaches and useful strategies, the skillfulness of the presentation, whether the workshop was worth the client's time and whether the workshop goals were met. Workshop participants are also asked to comment on what they liked most, and least, as well as to list any recommendations they might have to improve the workshop.

The Interns also receive feedback

from their individual clients through anonymous client satisfaction surveys. These surveys are conducted twice a year, once mid-fall and once mid-winter. Every Counselling Centre client scheduled with an appointment over an approximate three week period, is asked to comment on a number of dimensions including: helpfulness of the counselling, any positive, negative or problematic aspects of the experience with the counsellor, whether the client would refer a friend who had a problem to this counsellor, and the impact the counselling has had on academic productivity or performance, as well as any suggestions for improvement.

To ensure that the needs of the Interns are being met by the programme, mid-term written evaluations are conducted by each Intern. The Intern's written evaluations of the Internship Programme assesses, on a Likert Scale and with an open ended questions, the goals and objectives, volume and variety of practice issues, skill building opportunities, opportunities for consultation and feedback, application of theory to practice, innovative approaches as well as the contribution made to the Intern's personal and professional growth and development.

The quality of the supervision during the Internship is also evaluated by the Intern's written mid-term assessment. Interns address, through open-ended questions, the supervisor's ability to convey counselling strategies, give constructive feedback, the quality of and time made available for consultation, how well personal reflection is facilitated and how well the Intern is aided in remaining goal directed. In addition, at year's end, Interns also write a reflective paper that details the impact the training and supervision has had on their personal and professional development. Interns have, on occasion, published newsletter articles describing their experiences. (Cochrane (2005), Reid (2002), Gates (1991), Wentworth & Burley (1988), MacRae (1987).)

Impact

It is difficult to fully quantify the impact that the career counselling training has had on the Interns and on those they serve and influence. As there is a vast array of clients, schools, agencies,

and institutions represented by our Interns, no tools exist which could effectively measure, in numbers alone, the impact of the training on professional practice. To be as fully descriptive as possible, impressive qualitative data has been gathered from committee reviews, Intern evaluations and programme surveys.

Four sources of evaluation were examined and used to review the impact of the Internship Programme: University Committee Review (McKee, 1990); feedback from two professional association award review committees (CCACC, 2001), (AACUSS, 2001); an analysis of evaluations submitted by Interns during their training (1987-2004), and most importantly, data from a recent survey of all former Interns (Hung, 2006). All sources of the data point to the reciprocal benefits for Dalhousie University, the Interns themselves and the communities they serve, and to the profession of career counselling.

Benefits to Dalhousie University

In 1990 a Review Committee reported "that Dalhousie University's career counselling and career information activities benefited very substantially from the presence of the career interns" (McKee, 1990, p.3). Having served thousands of students through their individual counselling, group work, innovative programming, and outreach activities, the Interns have made an important contribution to the career development of Dalhousie University students.

An unanticipated impact was that many of the Interns who were School Counsellors on educational leaves would be sought out by their former students. The Interns were then in the unique situation of helping their former high school students with the transition to Dalhousie University. Every September the enthusiasm and energy of the Interns' former students, often with their parents in tow, has had an immediate and noticeable impact on the Counselling Center. In describing the benefits of the Internship, Hung (1999) stated in an article "The Interns contribute positively to the career development of our students, the comprehensiveness of our service, and to the

atmosphere of our University" (p.3).

Similarly, in describing the Internship, Hayashi (2001) wrote "the university receives as much benefit as it provides through the internship programme. Dalhousie University benefits directly and significantly by the hours and hours of direct Career Counselling the interns provide to our students as they train. In a time of staff shortages, this is an important benefit which impacts the quality of student life by significantly increasing access to Career Counselling" (personal communication to Atlantic Association of College and University Student Services, May, 2001).

Benefits to Interns and Communities Served

The 1990 University Review Committee who reviewed the programme content also interviewed all Interns trained to that date and their employers, as well as small sample of student volunteers. The committee noted that the "Interns were unanimous in their endorsement of the programme and the benefits for them in terms of their own professional development" (McKee, 1990, p.2-4). The committee also noted that there was evidence of improved services to the communities the Interns subsequently served (several specific applications ranging from innovative programs for women in corrections, to establishing career counselling programming in a high school, to the creation of Career Information Centres). Recognition has also been given to the Interns and the Internship Programme through awards which have, in part, acknowledged the internship as "world-class...with ...the ripple effect of training high quality career development professionals who offer their services in many counselling sectors" (Canadian Counselling Association, 2001). The training was also acknowledged as "compelling and unique...resulting in improved career counselling and development service delivery in this province" (Atlantic Association of College and University Student Services, 2001).

Equally important is the profound impact the training program has had on the skills and knowledge of the Career Counselling Interns. After their year of

intense study of career development research, models, issues and practices and the supervised counselling of students from Dalhousie University, the University of King's College and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Interns have reported that they are able to integrate what they have learned into their own practice and have developed new strategies and interventions for their own populations.

Former Interns presently serve the career needs of a wide range of clientele, from the most advantaged to the most disadvantaged. The Interns reported that since completing the Internship they have implemented many new programs and have become more career counselling focused. This has had an impact not only on schools and community agencies in large cities, but also on those located in small towns and villages throughout Nova Scotia. Many Interns provide direct service to their clients in school and community agencies. Others have gone on to work in highly placed administrative positions, positively influencing career development programming as well as providing supervision and support to other counsellors. The influence of our Interns can be seen throughout local universities and community services, as well as in some unanticipated areas across Canada and around the world.

Interns reported that the Internship enhanced their skills and better prepared them to create career development materials and programmes tailored to the needs of their clients. They have worked with the most experienced job seekers and with those new to Canada. In addition to providing quality career and employment counselling and career information resources for their most gifted clients, their work has been as varied as providing programming which has transformed the lives of youth-at-risk, unemployed single moms, and homeless adults. Their innovations have ranged from creating the first virtual Career Information Center in a high school to training street youth workers in six Latin American countries, to creating the first career development programming for women at a university in Abu Dhabi.

The combination of the academic and practical education the Interns

experienced as well as their exposure to such a vast array of clients with diverse backgrounds, ages, cultures and goals, prepared them to work with many different client issues and populations. As the impact of the Internship began to have an effect nationally and internationally, we learned that our Interns have supported the marginalized victims of crime, abuse, neglect and poverty and, through their career conversations, have brought hope to those who were in despair.

Interns have described how the full year of study and practice has changed them professionally and personally. A recurring theme in their feedback is the profound impact the Internship has had on their counselling skills and on their preparedness to develop strategies and interventions to assist clients with the psychological, emotional, physical, spiritual, cultural, and familial realms of their clients' lives. In addition, themes and patterns also emerged in their feedback about how the internship affected them personally. Clearly, all of the Interns have found that the Internship was an important part of their professional growth and development. Collectively their feedback has revealed that:

- They rated the Internship as being the best professional development opportunity available in Nova Scotia.
- They tremendously appreciated the professionalism, dedication, knowledge and commitment to the highest standards of practice in professional supervision.
- They valued the emphasis and time which was made for their learning, research and client consultations, and appreciate that these were clearly a priority for the supervisor.
- They valued the atmosphere which fostered professional growth and development, in a supportive and collaborative learning environment, tailored to the Intern's individual needs.
- They felt inspired and motivated while they studied, observed, discussed and practiced career counselling.
- Their self-confidence increased while observing an improvement of their counselling skills and in their

practical as well as theoretical knowledge as they received supportive, respectful, frank and open feedback.

- They successfully developed their own approach to career counselling, well grounded in research.
- They valued the practical experiences, exposure to high standards of practice and the opportunities to work with diverse populations.
- They appreciated the opportunity to examine the psychological model of Career Counselling Services, and the opportunity to use and adapt it to their own client populations.
- They appreciated the unanticipated spin-offs and impact on their jobs, careers and professional writings and responsibilities.

Limitations and benefits

An important element of any counsellor education training is the ability to evaluate its

impact. Future research is needed to address limitations in evaluation and create guidelines that would assist supervisors of internships to build data collection into their programs. In a time of cutbacks in education, lack of funding for an Internship is also a severe limitation. There is a daunting list of possible challenges including the strong one-on-one teaching emphasis of the Internship combined with the administrative issues of space, resources for marketing, selection, supervision, training, evaluation, consultation, on-going supportive contact, and issues related to the training sites' own need to stay current and as a model for the Interns.

With the support of the Counselling Foundation of Canada, however, the limitations are greatly outweighed by the benefits of increased service to the students served by Dalhousie University Counselling Centre. In addition, anecdotal evidence has clearly revealed that the specialty training in career counselling has allowed former Interns to develop and enhance career services practices and make extraordinary contributions to a number of public schools, universities and community agencies locally, nationally and internationally. The impact the Interns have on the profession of career counseling can

be seen as they create innovative programming, publish papers and articles, present at conferences and work on numerous provincial and national committees and professional associations. Their tireless passion for educating, leading and promoting excellence in practice will continue through their modeling of the best practices in the field of career choice and development.

Summary

The Dalhousie University Career Counselling Internship Programme is a full-time program of work and study designed to foster the development of a career counselling specialty. The Internship Programme is grounded in career development theory, models, research, and practices and has been evaluated as having a profound impact on the Interns' personal and professional growth and development. As the Interns learn how to improve their practices, reciprocal benefits occur: to the Dalhousie University Counselling Center with thousands of hours of increased service to clients; personal and professional benefits for staff who work in an environment which places significant emphasis on professional learning, growth and development; to the atmosphere of the university which responds to the enthusiasm of the Interns; to the Interns' own client populations with improved and expanded service delivery; and to the profession which is permeated with their multiple contributions.

After nearly two decades of experience with this well established model, it is time for other universities, and counselling centers, as well as Provincial Departments of Education, to follow the pioneering lead of the Counselling Foundation of Canada and provide support to allow this programme to be available in every province and territory in Canada.

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