4

Minoritized Students' Internship Experiences in World Languages: A Call for Research

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Abstract

Higher education has undergone important shifts over the past two decades, with U.S. universities placing more emphasis on career readiness and internships becoming an integral part of academia (National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2021). Moreover, the student population in U.S. universities has become more diverse (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023), which has drawn more attention to issues of equity and access to career readiness initiatives such as internships (Greenman et al., 2022). Disparities exist for students from historically marginalized racial and ethnic communities, such as Black, Latinx, and Afro-Latinx students, from their White peers not only in internships participation but also in world language courses particularly at upper levels of study (Glenn & Wassell, 2018). Furthermore, little is known about internship experiences that require target language use for world language students, notably about minoritized students' experiences. This position paper summarizes key findings from the literature on internships and career readiness, reports on the disproportionately low number of minoritized students participating in internships and advanced world language study alike and calls for research to be conducted on students' internship experiences in world language programs, especially for minoritized students.

Keywords: *Minoritized students, internships, world languages, career readiness, equity*

Introduction

The United States has often been portrayed and perceived as a diverse and stable democracy. However, inequities prevail in its education system, which has led some scholars to rank the U.S. school system as one of the most unequal in the industrialized world (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Despite evidence of the professional benefits of world language study and internships, racial and ethnic disparities continue for historically marginalized racial and ethnic

communities, such as Black and Latinx students, henceforth termed *minoritized* students, to underline the social construction of the minority status as dependent on context (Glenn & Wassell, 2018). Research shows that minoritized students remain underrepresented in U.S. world language courses (Anya, 2011; Anya, 2020; Charle Poza, 2013; Moore, 2005; Zárate-Sández, 2021) and participate in internships at lower rates than their White counterparts (Hora et al., 2021; National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2020). Accordingly, limited research has been conducted on the experiences of minoritized students in both world language courses (Anya, 2020) and internship programs (Hora et al., 2020), and to date, there is a lack of research on the experiences of minoritized students in world languages internship programs.

Barriers to internships and world language studies can reduce learning and career opportunities for minoritized students and place them at a disadvantage in the job market (Ali et al., 2022; Hora et al., 2020). Indeed, students who participate in internships develop multiple skills, have more opportunities to find jobs, and earn higher salaries (Finley, 2023; NACE, 2013; Rigsby et al., 2013). Moreover, in our increasingly globalized and interconnected world, intercultural competence and proficiency in a world language have become necessary skills, which explains why the demand for multilingual interculturally competent graduates is unprecedentedly high (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages [ACTFL], 2019). Therefore, unequal access to world language courses and internship programs are among the most pressing issues in the field of World Languages as they contribute to keeping the U.S. education system, and U.S. society at large, inherently unequal. Making world language courses and internship programs more accessible to minoritized students could help reduce some of the inequities that still prevail in higher education and the workplace.

Literature Review

Career Readiness

Since the end of World War II, liberal education, which can be defined as "an approach to undergraduate education that promotes the integration of learning across the curriculum and cocurriculum [sic], and between academic and experiential learning, in order to develop specific learning outcomes that are essential for work, citizenship, and life," (American Association of Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], n.d.-a) has prevailed in the United States. With the rise of tuition costs and student debt over the past 20 years, universities in the United States are increasingly held accountable regarding the extent to which they prepare students for future careers and increase student *employability* (Thorp & Goldstein, 2018), which is "the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment" (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p. 12). To foster employability in an increasingly liberal, global, and competitive job market, students expect to develop their career readiness, also known as work readiness, while in college (Thorp & Goldstein, 2018). For these reasons, career readiness has grown in popularity in higher education.

Although interest in career readiness has grown in popularity in U.S. universities, this concept is rarely described in specific terms, so students often do not have a clear understanding of what career readiness entails or how to attain it (Simonsen, 2022). The NACE (2021) defined *career readiness* as "a foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college-educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management" (p. 1) and identified eight Career Readiness Competencies: (1) career and self-development, (2) communication, (3) critical thinking and problem-solving, (4) equity and inclusion, (5) leadership, (6) professionalism and work ethic, (7) teamwork and collaboration, and (8) digital technology.

Despite the prevalence of career readiness and employability initiatives in higher education, universities often fail to prepare students for their intended careers (Divan et al., 2019). One reason behind this issue is the fact that the job market evolves fast, so universities are expected to prepare students for jobs and fields that do not yet exist (Thorp & Goldstein, 2018). Furthermore, universities have not addressed issues of equity when developing career readiness initiatives despite NACE's (2021) inclusion of equity and inclusion as one of eight Career Readiness Competencies. Ignoring equity in career-readiness initiatives can perpetuate inequity in education and the corporate world (Greenman et al., 2022). Indeed, failing to emphasize equity in career readiness initiatives may prevent minoritized students from accessing and benefiting from professional opportunities to the same extent as White students, thus perpetuating an unequal educational system in which students cannot increase their *social mobility*, which can be defined as a "change in a person's socio-economic situation, either in relation to their parents (inter-generational mobility) or throughout their lifetime (intra-generational mobility)" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], n.d., What is Social Mobility section).

Career Readiness in World Language Studies

Career readiness has grown in popularity in the field of World Languages as well. ACTFL's (2012) proficiency guidelines state that students learning a world language who reach an Advanced proficiency level should be able to communicate in professional contexts using the target language. Moreover, ACTFL (2020) has posited that the overarching goal of world language instruction should be to help students reach the Advanced proficiency level and provide career readiness preparation. Although ACTFL's World-Readiness Standards provide a framework to foster world language students' ability to use the target language in different social functions and contexts (National Standards Collaborative Board [NSCB], 2015), they do not explicitly address career readiness in terms of problem-solving, equity, leadership, professionalism, and digital technology (Simonsen, 2022).

Historically, world language programs in U.S. universities have focused on literary studies and have not facilitated the acquisition of skills and knowledge needed for the most common careers (Duggan, 2009; Simonsen, 2022). This trend is problematic at a time when most world language programs face decreasing enrollments (MLA, 2022) while students who may perceive that world language

programs cannot adequately prepare them for a career refrain from majoring in a world language. Simonsen (2022) proposed that language programs reduce their emphasis on literary and cultural studies to emphasize language for specific purposes (LSP) courses (e.g., Business French or Medical Spanish). Simonsen also advocated for the development of *language mediation*, which can be defined as the ability to act as a "social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes across modalities … and sometimes from one language to another" (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2020, p. 90). Moreover, a report by ACTFL (2019) identified translation as the most common language skill that employers lack and outsource, which is why Colina and Lafford (2017) argued that translation and interpretation should be emphasized in world language courses.

Internships

Employability is a strong motivator for students to attend college and higher education institutions are increasingly expected to produce career-ready graduates (Thorp & Goldstein, 2018). For this reason, internships have become an integral means of preparing college students for their intended careers. Indeed, in a survey conducted for the AAC&U, Finley (2023) found that 70% of employers would be 'much more likely' to consider a job candidate who had completed an internship and 71% reported being 'much more likely' to consider a job candidate who held a job or work-study position. Research on internships is growing and provides valuable insights into the internship experiences of university students.

Since the early 2000s, internships have become an important aspect of higher education after being designated as a high-impact practice (HIP), which are defined as learning experiences with significant educational benefits (AAC&U, n.d.-b). Even though the increase in the number of internships has led to more research on internships, the existing literature is limited by its ambiguity as researchers rarely define internships in specific terms (Hora et al., 2020) or tend to use a wider angle to frame their inquiry by adding insights from students who participate in other HIPs such as study abroad programs, exchange programs, practica, co-ops, and externships.

Internships can be defined as "a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting" (NACE, 2023a, p. 1). Internships are a form of work-based learning (WBL), which has grown in popularity since the 1990s (Bailey et al., 2004). However, internships differ from other WBL experiences such as co-ops, apprenticeships, and practica. Hora et al. (2017) argued that one core difference between internships and other WBL experiences is the fact that internships are less regulated and standardized. Indeed, co-ops, apprenticeships, and practica are strictly regulated by federal and state standards and have clearly defined criteria and objectives. Conversely, internships rarely include clearly defined objectives and are not regulated as much as other types of WBL (Hora et al., 2017).

Internship Outcomes

Although limited research studies have been conducted on internship outcomes in the Arts and Humanities and few, if any, have been conducted in World Languages, previous research findings conducted in other disciplines as well as on the general student populations provide valuable insights into internship outcomes.

Professional Outcomes

Longitudinal studies have shown that internships have many positive effects on professional and career-related outcomes. Specifically, students with internship experience have a higher probability of getting job interviews (Baert et al., 2021), with Nunley et al. (2016) finding that internship experience increased job interview rates by 14%. Students with internship experience are also less likely to be unemployed (Silva et al., 2016) and are four times more likely to receive employment that aligns with their career goals (Callanan & Benzing, 2004). Former interns have higher incomes when entering the workforce (Margaryan et al., 2022) and spend less time searching for their first job after graduation (Oswald-Egg & Renold, 2021). Longitudinal studies have also demonstrated that participation in an internship increases employment retention, with former interns being more likely to remain in a position five years after graduation (Di Meglio et al., 2022).

Internships also have positive outcomes on *career adaptability*, which can be defined as "a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and imminent vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas" (Savickas, 2005, p. 51). Savickas (2005) argued that career adaptability is made of four psychological dimensions—also known as the 4Cs of adaptability—which are career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence. Career concern is individuals' concerns with their vocational future, career control can be defined as individuals' feelings and beliefs that they are responsible for constructing their careers, career curiosity means that individuals are interested in learning about work opportunities, and career confidence is the ability to counter challenges and obstacles to achieve success. Ocampo et al. (2020) found that internship participation increased all four aspects of career adaptability and that students who did not participate in internships only increased the career concern dimension, indicating that students who do not participate in internships may experience higher levels of concerns regarding their future careers.

Hora et al. (2020) found that the most cited outcomes of an internship were its practicality (i.e., hands-on experience and real-world experience), the opportunity to try different career paths that may or may not interest students, and the opportunity to enter a field or specific company in which students want to work. Similarly, O'Connor et al. (2021) found that internships in a kinetics program positively informed students' learning because they provided students the opportunity to apply their knowledge in practical ways, network, engage in professional development, and develop professional skills such as resiliency, time management, and critical thinking. However, a few studies have shown that voluntary internships have higher professional outcomes than internships that are required for graduation. Jung and

Lee (2017) conducted a quantitative study on the effect of internship experience on the job performance of South Korean graduates and found that participants who had completed a voluntary internship reported higher professional outcomes and internship satisfaction.

Academics and Skill-Building

Research shows that internships have academic benefits. Binder et al. (2015) found in a large survey study conducted with 15,732 college students in the United Kingdom that internships had positive effects on students' grades and GPAs. Internships have also been linked to higher degrees of learning and the quality of work that one performs has been found to increase work engagement and organizational commitment (Drewery et al., 2019). D'abate et al. (2009) found that interns reported higher levels of satisfaction when they felt that their internship contributed to their learning. In a study conducted with 154 undergraduate interns, Downs et al. (2024) found that internships foster three meta-competencies: self-regulation (i.e., adaptability and coping skills) self-awareness (i.e., a sense of self or identity), and self-direction (i.e., responsibility-taking behavior and meta-learning). Kilgo et al.'s (2015) survey with 2,212 students from 17 different universities in the United States indicated that internship participation had significant positive outcomes on critical thinking, moral reasoning, intercultural engagement, and socially responsible leadership.

Research also shows that internships can bolster students' confidence. Renschler et al. (2023) found that students participating in an internship reported greater confidence in their résumé and significantly greater confidence when representing themselves during a job interview. Previous research also indicates that internships increase leadership skills. Crawford et al. (2014) conducted a study on the effect of internships on students' engagement in leadership experience. They recruited 111 participants enrolled in an introductory hospitality course, which served as a control group, and 219 participants enrolled in a senior-level internship course, which served as the experimental group. They analyzed the ways in which internships affect students' leadership skills in five key behaviors: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Crawford et al. (2014) found that students enrolled in the internship course scored higher in these five key behaviors than students in the control group, suggesting that internships increase students' leadership skills.

Factors Informing Outcomes and Satisfaction

Although little is known about the factors that inform the internship outcomes for students from historically marginalized racial and ethnic minorities, a growing literature exists on the factors that inform internship outcomes and satisfaction for the general student populations. Research shows that internship attributes can affect internship outcomes. Hussien and La Lopa (2018) found that job characteristics (e.g., the variety of skills and activities in the internship program), responsibilities and independence given to interns, organizational factors (e.g., supervisor's support, encouragement from coworkers), gain of practical and theoretical knowledge,

professional growth, and contextual factors (e.g., flexible working hours and internship location) contributed to increased internship satisfaction. Interestingly, they found that task significance and credit requirement did not affect internship satisfaction and outcomes. Hora et al.'s (2017) study also provided valuable insights into internship factors that increase students' learning and perceived internship outcomes. Using survey methods, they found that participants assigned high ratings to the relationship between their internship and academic program, the clarity of task-related goals, and their degree of work autonomy. Additional findings emerged from focus groups in this study, especially the importance of alignment between academic programs and internships, indicating that internships allow students to apply the concepts they have learned in class. In other words, the study highlighted some important internship outcomes such as clear goals, autonomy, and relatedness to academic programs, which can contribute to students' satisfaction with their internship experiences. These findings indicate that internship stakeholders can increase students' internship satisfaction by considering important demographic, organizational, and contextual factors when designing internship opportunities.

The role of internship mentors and supervisors has been the focus of extensive research and has been found to increase intern's level of satisfaction with their internships. Ali et al. (2022) conducted a study with 6,802 recent graduates across 200 colleges and universities in the United States and found that supervisor support contributed to learning, internship satisfaction, and post-internship job offer acceptance. The researchers also found that students who had mentors or supervisors with whom they could share fears, anxieties, and emotions reported better outcomes, which implies that universities and employers need to facilitate strong mentor-mentee relationships. An important aspect of *socialization*, which is a process through which interns learn to navigate the workplace by networking and learning expectations for the job (Gardner & Kozlowski, 1993), is the relationship between intern and supervisor. A supervisor can provide psychological support, act as a coach, guide, or mentor, and provide feedback on performance and career plans (Carless et al., 2012). Hussien and La Lopa (2018) found that university support factors, such as guidance from internship directors and internship offices, contributed to internship satisfaction, but Hora et al. (2020) found that supervisor mentoring was perceived as more valuable than supervisor support, indicating that receiving specific instructions and feedback on performance and career planning from supervisors increases internship satisfaction.

Some studies have investigated the ways in which demographic factors inform internship outcomes and satisfaction. Hussien and La Lopa (2018) found that several intern characteristics such as gender, age, positive attitude, and self-initiative contributed to interns' level of satisfaction with their internships. Women were more satisfied with their supervisors and task clarity than men, interns who were younger than 20 years old were more satisfied with the support from their internship office, supervisor, task clarity, learning opportunity, and work hours than interns who were older than 20 years old, and interns who had positive expectations and higher self-initiative reported greater satisfaction. Few studies (e.g., Lake, 2023) have also investigated internship outcomes in relation to race and ethnicity, which will be

discussed in the final section of the present literature review.

Internship Challenges

The existing literature on internships sheds some light on the challenges associated with internship participation as well as the obstacles that can prevent students from participating in an internship. The following section presents an overview of some of the empirical research findings on internship challenges and barriers for the general university student population. Specific challenges and barriers for minoritized students will be discussed in the third section of this literature review.

Structural Barriers

Various structural barriers reduce internship participation in the United States. In the most recent *National Survey of College Internships*, Hora et al. (2021) found that 67.3% of non-interns reported wanting to complete an internship but could not because of various obstacles. The most cited barriers were the lack of knowledge on how to find an internship (59.4%), a heavy course load (55.9%), cancellation of internships due to the COVID-19 pandemic (44.2%), lack of internship opportunities (41.3%), and the need to work a paid job (40.1%). In a longitudinal study conducted over four years, Hora et al. (2023) found additional obstacles to internship participation such as insufficient internship pay, the lack of transportation to get to the internship site, and family-related responsibilities such as childcare.

According to Gosh et al. (2023), participation in internships varies significantly across fields of study, with Arts and Humanities having the lowest ratio of internship participation for senior students (42%). Their survey also revealed that gaps between interest and participation exist in all fields. However, the largest gaps were found in the fields of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Business, and Social Service Professions, which may be an indication that not enough internship opportunities exist in these fields or that there is a lack of outreach initiatives between universities and professionals working in those fields. These findings can also explain the limited literature on internships in the Arts and Humanities and the absence of studies on internships in World Languages.

One of the obstacles to internship participation that has received the most attention in the literature on internships relates to financial resources. Students' financial status and need to work a paid job often reduce their ability to participate in an internship. Although unpaid internships have positive outcomes on students (Hurst et al., 2023), compensation has been found to increase students' level of satisfaction with their internships (McHugh, 2017), and unpaid interns have reported feeling exploited (Siebert & Wilson, 2013). Research also shows that compensation has a positive effect on the number of job offers that former interns receive as well as their starting salaries (NACE, 2013; Rigsby et al., 2013). Scholars and national organizations have criticized the increasing number of unpaid internships because, in their view, uncompensated internships can perpetuate inequity since minoritized students are less likely to be in paid internships (NACE, 2023b). Participants in O'Connor et al.'s (2021) study reported that their internship was used as a

work placement rather than a learning opportunity. These findings indicate that universities need to ensure that internships are student-oriented in nature and that they align with students' interests, career goals, and learning needs.

The duration of internships has also been found to be problematic. Specifically, college internships last for 18.3 weeks on average (Hora et al., 2021), which may not provide enough time for interns to develop skills and become acquainted with the field and the internship site. Indeed, the structure of internships often reduces learning opportunities. O'Connor et al. (2021) found that the small number of work hours and the long commute time were among the structural barriers that reduced learning opportunities during internship experiences. These findings have valuable implications for institutions of higher learning, academic programs, and internship supervisors who can address structural issues such as internship duration and modality when designing internship opportunities.

Various Stakeholders with Different Needs

Internships involve various stakeholders, such as students, employers, and faculty members, who may have different perceptions of the value and expectations of an internship. The most recent *Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey* by the Higher Education Research Institute (2020) found that 82% of freshmen reported wanting to go to college to get a better job and 76% to be prepared for a specific career. Yet, a study conducted for the AAC&U found that only 44% of employers strongly agreed that recent college graduates were prepared to succeed in entry-level positions and 39% somewhat agreed (Finley, 2023). The study also provided data on the discrepancy between the skills that employers need and students' self-reported level of preparedness for those skills. The highest discrepancies pertained to oral communication (81% of employers reported the skills as very important but only 49% of students felt prepared for the skill), adaptability and flexibility (81% and 51% respectively), critical thinking (79% and 49%), problem-solving (74% and 50%), written communication (77% and 54%), and creative and innovative thinking (76% and 53%). Employers ranked critical thinking, oral communication, ability and flexibility, and problem-solving as the four skills they would like colleges to emphasize. Overall, research shows that employers need college students to possess more soft skills (Thorp & Goldstein, 2018).

Few studies have investigated the perceptions and expectations of each internship stakeholder concurrently (Sauder et al., 2019). In a survey study conducted with 132 students, 148 employers, and 41 faculty, Sauder et al. (2019) found 33 significant differences between the perceptions held by students, employers, and faculty members. Specifically, 11 differences in perception of the value of internships were found, 10 of which were reported between students and the other two stakeholders. Students ranked the value of internships higher than the other two stakeholders on all survey items, meaning that they had higher expectations from their internship experience. Interestingly, the only item that they ranked lower than the other two stakeholders was the expectation that the internship would be a collaborative effort between all three stakeholders. Differences were identified between students and employers on all but one item, indicating a divide between employer and student expectations regarding skill development, acquisition and

application of knowledge, and post-graduation job opportunities. The intensity of the internship was the only significant difference found between employers and faculty, with employers preferring full-time internships while faculty expressed a preference for part-time internships.

Sauder et al. (2019) also identified differences in the perceptions of responsibilities of internship sites. As with perceptions of the value of internships, students had higher expectations than the other two stakeholders. They had higher expectations than employers in terms of supervision, exposure to multiple aspects of the organization, pay, reimbursement of expenses, and development of full-time positions after completion of the internship—which were the same expectations that faculty ranked higher than employers—and higher expectations than faculty regarding the need to have a detailed internship description, work on an individualized project, and receive references and referrals for jobs after the internship. The only expectation that employers ranked higher than faculty was the expectation to provide a reference or referral after the internship. Faculty expressed a stronger desire to have a dedicated on-site internship supervisor while employers expressed a preference for faculty mentors to conduct site visits. Vélez and Giner (2015) found that interns report strong needs for supervision and mentoring, but Yiu and Law (2012) found that faculty members have limited time to mentor interns. Overall, research shows that internship stakeholders have significantly different needs and expectations, which is an important implication for academic programs offering internship opportunities to their students.

Addressing Challenges

The existing literature on internships provides limited suggestions to counter some of the barriers to internship participation and address some of the most common internship challenges. O'Connor et al. (2021) conducted a study to investigate students' level of satisfaction with their internship experience. Their participants were asked to provide suggestions on strategies to increase intern's preparedness for internships. The researchers found that participants' suggestions focused on four strategies: gaining more knowledge of the field before pursuing an internship, having more practical training within the first three years of their degree, fully understanding the nature and expectations of the internship before accepting the position, and ensuring that all stakeholders—employer, intern, and faculty member—agree on expectations of the intern's role. These findings indicate that internship stakeholders can increase students' internship readiness by preparing students for an internship in the early stages of their college studies and providing them with clear guidelines and expectations.

In sum, empirical research on internships is limited by the near absence of data on internship experiences in the Arts and Humanities, specifically in World Languages, and its lack of focus on minoritized students. Given that the study of world languages involves a unique set of competencies and standards, we can assume that internships for world language students differ from internships in other fields, primarily due to the use of a language different from the interns' native language.

According to the NACE (2023a), internships are an extension of classroom learning, so investigating students' internship experiences in world language programs without analyzing the current state of minoritized students in world language courses might not provide a complete and accurate account of internship experiences in world language programs. For this reason, the next section provides a brief summary of the literature on enrollment concerns for minoritized students in world language programs followed by empirical research on their experiences in internships in general, noting the lack of internships in the Arts and Humanities.

Minoritized Students in World Languages

Research shows that minoritized students remain underrepresented in U.S. world language courses (Anya, 2011; Anya, 2020; Charle Poza, 2013; Moore, 2005; Zárate-Sández, 2021). Language classes, especially at the advanced level, are predominantly comprised of White students, with African American students among the least likely groups to continue through year three or beyond at the high school level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Glynn and Wassell (2018), summarize the three primary reasons found in the literature to explain the disproportion of minority students in advanced world language study to be exacerbated by (1) the devaluation of students' languages and cultures in schools (e.g., Valenzuela, 2010); (2) the elitist nature of language study (Reagan & Osborn, 2002); and (3) the one-sided nature of the curriculum (Kleinsasser, 1993). Historically, many students' home cultures and languages have been devalued in schools (Paris & Alim, 2017). El Haj (2006) reports comments from an African American student in an ethnographic study who stated, "Black people as a whole have to learn more about themselves before they begin to learn about other cultures" (p. 157). Despite this important finding, limited research has been conducted on the experiences of minoritized students in world language courses (Anya, 2020). Reagan and Osborn (2002) argue that many language programs tend to be designed to weed out academically weak students. Furthermore, teachers, counselors, and administrators need to believe that all students should be encouraged to study foreign languages. Lastly, world language teachers need to strive to overcome a colonial curriculum present in traditional world language textbooks and integrate topics that address the language diaspora and social justice issues into all levels of language study (Glynn, Wesely, & Wassell, 2014).

Students from Historically Marginalized Racial and Ethnic Communities in Internships

Research demonstrates that internships are valuable for students, especially for college students with low income, first-generation college students, and minoritized students because internships can increase students' social mobility (Hora et al., 2023). Despite well-documented positive outcomes, research shows that a significant number of students want to participate in internships but do not and only 30% of students participate in internships (NCES, 2022). Even more concerning is the fact that racial disparities in internship participation have been reported (Hora et al.,

2017, Hora et al., 2020), which poses the question of whether internships are truly accessible to all students equally and what factors prevent minoritized students from participating in internships. The scant on internships with a focus on students' racial and ethnic backgrounds provides some valuable insights into the internship experience of minoritized students, specifically concerning internship accessibility, outcomes, and challenges.

Internship Accessibility and Racial Disparities in Internship Participation

Scholars have argued that the changes in student demographics require universities to investigate issues of access and equity in internship programs (Finley & McNair, 2013), yet little research has been conducted (Wolfgram et al., 2021). Moreover, many studies on internships have focused on the general student population at institutions of higher learning without consideration of important demographic factors such as race, ethnicity, and first-generation status (e.g., Crawford et al., 2014; Hussien & La Lopa, 2018; McHugh, 2017; O'Connor et al., 2021; Sauder et al., 2019; Stofer et al., 2021).

The few studies that have considered race and ethnicity in internships have revealed that internship participation varies significantly based on students' racial and ethnic backgrounds and that minoritized students remain underrepresented in internship programs (Gosh et al., 2023; Hora et al., 2021; Hora et al., 2022; Wofgram et al., 2021). According to the *National Survey of College Internships*, 24% of White students reported having participated in an internship, but only 13% of Black students reported having completed an internship (Hora et al., 2021). Although 11% of all undergraduate degrees are held by Black students (NCES, 2018), the NACE (2020) found in a survey administered to 22,371 students that only 6% of students who had participated in an internship were Black and 71% were White, confirming the fact that Black students participate in internships at significantly lower rates than their White counterparts. The NACE survey also indicated that Latinx students are more likely to never participate in an internship.

Obstacles to Internship Participation

Little is known about the barriers that prevent minoritized students from participating in internships, but we know that their lower internship participation rates cannot be attributed to a lack of motivation to pursue an internship. Indeed, Hora et al. (2020) conducted a mixed-methods survey and focus group study to investigate internship access, design, and outcomes. They compared data from three U.S. colleges—one predominately White institution (PWI), a technical college, and an HBCU—and found that internship participation varied significantly based on demographics, academic, life circumstances, and employment status. They discovered that race was a factor determining access to internships. Specifically, they found that 64% of their 797 participants had wanted to pursue an internship but did not. These findings align with Wolfgram et al. (2021) who conducted a mixed-methods study conducted in an HBCU located in the state of Georgia. They found that 46% (n = 151) of their survey respondents did not participate in an internship,

91% (n = 137) of whom had wanted to participate in an internship but could not. Likewise, Gosh et al. (2023) found that Black students had the highest gap between internship intent and internship participation in five out of 10 fields of study while. In the fields of Arts and Humanities, the gap was measured as 34% for Black students against 22% for White students, which indicates that Black students in the fields of Arts and Humanities are less likely to participate in internships than their White peers.

When analyzing the factors that prevent internship participation from Black students at an HBCU, Wolfgram et al. (2021) found that the most cited obstacles were a heavy course load (689%), a lack of internship opportunities (58%), the need to work a paid job (50%), a lack of transportation (42%), insufficient internship pay (39%), and lack of childcare (20%). Interview data in their study revealed additional obstacles such as a competitive application process and a lack of time due to work and academic responsibilities. In a survey study conducted with 1,250 Latinx participants attending an HSI, Hora et al. (2022) found that obstacles to internship participation intersected with each other. Specifically, the most cited combinations of obstacles included heavy course loads and current work (46%), heavy course loads and lack of internship opportunities (39%), insufficient pay and heavy course loads (29%), and heavy course loads, current work, and lack of opportunities (28%). In one of the only comparative studies conducted on the barriers to internship participation across racial and ethnic groups, Hora et al. (2021) found the most significant differences between minoritized students and White students were the need to work a paid job (29% for Black students, 29% for Latinx students, and only 20% for White students) and unsure how to find an internship (36% for Black students, 40% for Latinx students and only 28% for White students). These findings indicate that working a paid job and the lack of knowledge or confidence on how to find an internship seem to be more problematic for minoritized students.

Internship participation also varies significantly based on students' employment status. Hora et al. (2020) found that students who worked fewer hours outside of school were more likely to participate in internships. Similarly, in a study conducted in an HBCU in Georgia, Worlfgram et al. (2021) found that 61% of students with no employment participated in an internship while only 45% of students with full-time employment and 47% of students with part-time employment participated in an internship. These findings are concerning given the increased number of students who must work outside of school due to inflation and the rising cost of tuition (Sylvia, 2020).

Empirical research shows that there is a significant relationship between GPA and internship participation and that students with lower GPAs need additional support in obtaining internships (Hora et al., 2020; Wolfgram et al., 2021). As we have already discussed, minoritized students tend to receive lower grades than their White counterparts, including in world language programs (Zárate-Sández, 2021), which can reduce their chances of receiving internship offers.

Lower internship participation can also be attributed to issues with confidence and low self-esteem. Phillips and Saxon (2018) found that Black students at a PWI expressed a lack of confidence and feelings of not being competitive enough when

considering applying for internships. Moreover, Lake (2023) found that Black students at a PWI felt discouraged from participating in internships when there were no other Black people represented. Her dissertation on the HIP experiences of Black students at a PWI demonstrates that the ability to interact with Black mentors and fellow Black interns can reduce the apprehension associated with internship participation.

Challenges Associated with Internship Participation

More attention has been drawn to the challenges that minoritized students experience while participating in an internship. First and foremost, the NACE (2020) found that White students are more likely to be in paid internships and Black and multi-racial students are more likely to be in unpaid internships. This trend was confirmed by Ali et al. (2022) who conducted a study on 6,802 recent graduates across 200 colleges and universities in the United States, 73% of whom were White. They found that White students were more likely to be in paid internships than minoritized students and reported higher learning and satisfaction with their internships.

Thompson et al. (2021) found that Black students experienced various challenges when navigating the different stages of the internship application process, with participants reporting a lack of internship opportunities for certain majors, geographic restrictions, and the perceived competitiveness of the internships. Thompson et al. (2021) found that Black felt overwhelmed when not being offered internships and expressed feelings of embarrassment, disappointment, rejection, failure, and not meeting expectations. Thomson et al. (2021) also found that some Black students received mixed reactions from their families, especially when being the first person in their families to go to college. Some participants reported that their families did not understand how challenging the internship process was and why they were working without pay.

Although studies have investigated the discrimination that minoritized students face in hiring practices, little is known about the discrimination that they may face during their internships. Scholars have found that internships are mostly designed by White faculty for White students and that they are not culturally relevant to students from other racial and ethnic groups (Finley & McNair, 2013). Yet, research shows that minoritized students need to participate in internships more than their White counterparts (Finley & McNair, 2013; Kinzie et al., 2021; Kuh, 2008). Kennedy et al. (2015) argued that experiential learning should nurture students' ability to engage in critical reflection on hegemony and social justice and enable students to innovate and critically assess current practices. However, the literature on internship challenges is still dominated by studies that do not emphasize the race and ethnicity of interns, so more research investigating the challenges that minoritized students face is needed.

Suggestions to Support Successful Internships for Minoritized Students

Studies investigating the positive outcomes of internships for minoritized students remain scarce. These studies have revealed that minoritized students report similar positive outcomes when compared to White students, specifically in terms of

skill-building. In a mixed-method study conducted in an HBCU located in Georgia, Wolfgram et al. (2021) found that internships contributed to Black students' learning and skill development. Thompson et al. (2021) reached similar results and found that participating in an internship enabled Black students to apply their knowledge and build various skills, including mastering software and equipment. Internships have also been found to help minoritized students explore fields and careers of interest, network, and build their resumes (Thompson et al., 2021).

A recurring theme in studies conducted with minoritized students is that pursuing an internship boosts their confidence (Storlie et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2021). Specifically, Storlie et al. (2016) found that internships can help students challenge self-deficit views. Participating in internships also enables minoritized students to access and build a support system made of peers and mentors with whom they can relate. Participants in Thompson et al.'s (2021) study reported that meeting fellow interns and networking with professionals, especially when they were from the same racial and ethnic groups, helped them feel more confident.

Limited research has investigated strategies to make internships more accessible to students from historically racial and ethnic communities. Greenman et al. (2022) found that universities usually respond in three ways to address issues of access and equity in HIPs: modified HIPs, curricular restructuring, and increased resources. Modified HIPs involve designing HIPs of various duration, cost, and modality. Curricular restructuring has been accomplished by requiring students to participate in HIPs and faculty to offer HIPs (Hansen & Schmidt, 2017), exposing students to HIPs during the early stages of their academic studies (Finley & McNair, 2013), and increasing HIP offerings across institution types such as community colleges (Laursen et al., 2012). To increase resources for students, faculty, and staff, universities have offered workshops as well as time release and promotion opportunities for faculty and staff who develop HIPs (Finley & McNair, 2013).

Research also shows that flexible internships are beneficial to students, especially minoritized students (Renschler et al., 2023). Indeed, minoritized students are more likely to work paid jobs, face financial hardship, and support their families financially (Storlie et al., 2016). Moreover, they are more likely to benefit from internships if they interact with professionals to whom they can relate (Kinzie et al., 2021; Lake, 2023; Murillo et al., 2017; Phillips & Saxton, 2018). Kinzie et al. (2021) found that minoritized students who participated in internships appreciated the opportunity to help others and make a difference in their community while gaining control, agency, and autonomy in their work. These findings align with a study conducted by Thompson et al. (2021) who found that Black students' backgrounds and life experiences informed their internship experiences. Their motivation to pursue an internship included the desire to make a positive difference in their communities and support their community members. These testimonies show that reciprocity can be an important need for minoritized students. Therefore, offering internship opportunities in which students interact with and learn from local communities is an important consideration when designing internship opportunities serving the needs of minoritized students.

Williams et al. (2020) provided five steps organizations can take to support Black interns. In the first step, enhance supervisor support, they recommend that

internship supervisors communicate support to interns directly and regularly, acknowledge and validate distress related to police brutality and civil unrest, educate interns on support available to them, help interns voice their concerns, and recognize that Black internship supervisors may also face distress. In the second step, maintaining engagement, they posit that internship organizations should nurture trust by recognizing that racial traumas are often delayed and manifest themselves as experience grows, that racism affects Black students daily, and that many Black students have built resilience and mechanisms to cope with racism, which means that they may not ask for help when needed. Organizations should also share the actions they are taking to support change and promote empathy, affirmation, and reciprocal values. In the third step, offer flexibility, Williams and colleagues suggest that Black interns be provided with flexible work schedules and work deadlines so they can attend to family and community obligations. In the fourth step, avoid making assumptions about Black student interns and avoid workplace discrimination. Williams et al. argue that organizations should eliminate racial microaggressions, avoid singling Black interns out, understand that not all Black interns are the same, commit to fighting racism, and avoid recruiting Black interns to portray the organization as diverse. In the final step, encouraging self-care and resilience, Williams and colleagues recommend that organizations educate themselves on racial issues so they can better support and empower Black interns.

Conclusion

The U.S. education system has been ranked as one of the most unequal in the industrialized world (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Recent racial issues in the United States, such as the death of George Floyd and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, have brought more attention to the inequities that still exist in U.S. society, including in higher education (Wesley et al., 2021). Consequently, more research has been conducted on equity and access in higher education and revealed that minoritized students still face unique challenges when attending universities and benefiting from world language studies and internships.

Internships have become key aspects of higher education because they offer multiple benefits for students (Baert et al., 2021; Di Meglio et al., 2022; Margaryan et al., 2022; Nunley et al., 2016; Oswald-Egg & Renold, 2021; Silva et al., 2016). However, little is known about the internship experiences of minoritized students (Hora et al., 2020), especially in world language programs. To address these research gaps, more research on the internship experiences of students in world language programs is greatly needed. Although previous studies offer valuable implications for internship stakeholders, specifically in terms of internship outcomes, they do not provide enough qualitative data on the internship experiences of students from historically marginalized racial and ethnic communities and do not give any insights into the internship experiences of minority students in world language programs. Accordingly, this position paper is intended to build a case to address the enrollment gap between minoritized and White students in advanced world language study and to increase opportunities for all students to pursue internships in world language programs, particularly for minoritized students. Ultimately, the goal of this position

paper is to put forth a call for the need for research on the experiences of minoritized students in internships in world language programs. This type of research would not only help internship stakeholders design more accessible and equitable internship opportunities for minoritized students but also help world language educators to be more inclusive in meeting the unique learning needs and career goals of their students.

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