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Pivoting from Face-to-Face Internships to Virtual Internships: Lessons Learned by Two Family Life Educators

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of the paper is to highlight the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on a Human Development and Family Studies internship program. The paper recounts some of the steps taken by the program to respond to the change from face-to-face to virtual internships for ninety interns who were in education, health, and human services agencies. Included is a discussion of the triumphs and challenges faced by the faculty, internship sites, and students. Additionally, the paper addresses implications for supervising and planning for future internships.

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### **Pivoting from Face-to-Face Internships to Virtual Internships: Lessons Learned by Two Family Life Educators**

Internship opportunities and other work-based learning experiences serve as essential complements to academic programs and classroom teaching (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Internships have been shown to increase employment after graduation, academic results, career crystallization, and to a lesser extent, long-term employability (Taylor, 1988; Virtanen, Tynjala, & Etelapelto, 2014). Internships are essential for Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) programs across the United States. It is an opportunity for students to apply course content to real-life situations in various settings, while also developing critical knowledge and skills for successful long-range career objectives (Hora, Wolfram, & Thompson, 2017).

In recent years, various family science scholars have shared best practices and research related to the value of internships for family life educators and family science programs. They noted that internships should provide students with an opportunity to learn and practice principles of family life education (e.g., Ballard & Carroll, 2005; Newman & Schmitt, 2017; Taylor et al., 2017; Tobias, 2017; Tobias & Hoff, 2016). They advocated for careful planning of internship goals, site selection, supervision, and opportunities to reflect on learning and apply family life education principles in real-world settings. Ballard and Carroll (2005) also noted that internships might "facilitate career maturity and the development of lifelong learning skills" (p. 11) and help establish credibility for the family science field. Many programs require students to show their understanding of and apply principles of family life education throughout the completion of their internships (Behrendt, 2017).

While requirements vary, a review of over 25 HDFS programs across the country shows that students typically dedicate at least twenty hours per week to their internship sites, gaining hands-on experiences in authentic, real-world contexts. Tobias and Huff (2016) examined commonalities among practicum experiences from directors of 38 CFLE-approved programs. They found that increasingly HDFS programs were using online course formats for the internship seminar and provided strategies for ensuring a quality online experience for the internship course. However, virtual internship extends beyond online supervision and online class engagement; it involves students having a fully online internship experience and engagement with sites virtually. We know little about the extent to which virtual internship exists within HDFS programs. Hora et al. (2021) defined a virtual internship as a "work-based learning program conducted only via digital or online technologies, but with important variations regarding host organization, program duration, and compliance with experiential learning standards (p. 6)".

COVID-19 took academia by surprise when most face-to-face internships ended. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many interns could not complete their internships on-site as planned with mandatory closures and social distancing requirements. Internship seminars and capstone programs were hit with an exorbitant endeavor; it required them to pivot within only a week's time frame from face-to-face to a meaningful virtual internship experience for students who were already stressed and anxious about their future career plans, meeting requirements for graduation, and surviving life during a pandemic. Besides the logistics of pivoting to face-to-face internships and minimizing stressors, it was also necessary that interns in HDFS programs maintained the family life education component embedded within their internship experiences.

Findings from research done with virtual social work internships during the pandemic within a healthcare setting show that with careful and creative planning, programs can provide students with the reflective skills and opportunities to process their growth and development (Mitchell et al., 2021). At the same time, they learned about providing care without having direct access to patients. Through role-plays, access to medical chart reviews, facilitated discussions, process recordings of emotions and thoughts, students could develop the skills needed to serve as future social workers (Mitchell et al. 2021).

Considering the unexpectedly prolonged effects of COVID-19, programs must share their experiences, including successes and lessons learned, as the family science field works towards supporting our students in fulfilling program requirements in challenging times. Academic programs can use this experience with the pandemic to streamline internship processes and better prepare for future challenges that might require virtual placements. Trends already suggest that several corporations provide more virtual/remote work (Parker et al., 2020). We expect a spill-over to internship opportunities. Additionally, natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and other environmental challenges, which are on the rise, may cause a change from face-to-face internships to remote or virtual experiences (O'Brien et al., 2008). We also expect that opportunities across the country will be more accessible through virtual means for students who seek unique opportunities unavailable locally. Hora et al. (2021) specifically examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on internships and found that internship participation was low in the semesters after the pandemic onset. More specifically, one in five students in their study reported completing an internship during the pandemic. They reported that issues with equity, communication, internet access will probably persist post-pandemic and that universities must prioritize equitable access and quality control as it relates to internships. Harden et al. (2021) examined the impact of the pandemic on Family and Consumer Sciences programs, including hospitality, fashion design, and merchandising, and provided a review of the processes used to help students adjust to the realities of the pandemic. Students showed resilience and could adapt to the changing dynamic and get a realistic view of the challenges companies faced during the pandemic. The narrative did not include family science students and programs. Therefore, within this paper, we have sought to:

1. Describe the experiences of one HDFS undergraduate program comprising ninety interns in the field.
2. Outline the steps taken by the program to transition to virtual internships.
3. Discuss challenges and triumphs encountered while pivoting to virtual internships; and
4. Discuss implications for future internship experiences in family science programs.

We used a combination of instructor reflections and survey responses from students in the paper. The responses of the students were coded using thematic analysis. We also include the perspectives of the site and faculty supervisors regarding their experiences adjusting to the pandemic.

### **Instructor Perspectives: Process of Pivoting to a Virtual Internships**

This section shares our thought processes and actions to support students who had to end their face-to-face internships and either work remotely or assume alternative tasks to complete their internships. Like many other Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) programs

across the United States, students were asked to cease all face-to-face engagement at their internship sites in the middle of the Spring 2020 semester. Our program had two weeks to adjust and design a plan for students to complete their internships. What follows is a description of the steps taken to assist both student interns and internship sites in adjusting to the realities of a virtual internship for the rest of the spring semester (i.e., six weeks).

## Communication

Communication within organizations is central to effective operations. Communication during a pandemic or emergency is an absolute necessity and a key practice that drives better change to constantly changing conditions brought about by a crisis (Whittlesey, 2020). Additionally, in a recent study that examined the experiences of supervisors and students in virtual internships, Youngblood (2020) found that clear communication about expectations and duties enhances the experience for all involved. They highlighted the need for both interns and supervisors to reconcile any differing perceptions about the internship to minimize conflict. We needed to make a quick pivot and communication plan for our students who were on their Spring Break when we (i.e., the faculty intern supervisors) learned about the complete movement to virtual classes.

We planned for the faculty and internship supervisors to meet and discuss the next steps. We wanted to reassure students that we were here to help and they would undoubtedly be able to finish their degree requirements. By showing empathy and conveying a message of togetherness, we fostered resilience in the face of a challenging and unprecedented situation. To ease their concerns, we assured students that the program was committed to vigorously leading discussions about their internship situation with sites. Our communication with sites and students included clear guidelines on concrete next steps to finish the semester. At the heart of our communication was the prioritization of the health and safety of everyone involved. Through frequent email communication, we affirmed our commitment to the sites and students for the completion of the internship.

## Overview of Tangible Steps for Students

Our team of faculty supervisors came together to brainstorm and discuss how to proceed with the internship once we were required to pivot from in-person to online. Most sites limited people from entering the agency, and the university asked programs to end face-to-face classes and internships. We consulted the literature on best practices for online training and overall online service-learning approaches. We found that family science programs use online technology in courses, but we know little about best practices for online internships (Tobias & Huff, 2016; Youngblood, 2020). Our focus was on helping students complete the semester successfully and adapting the course requirements to fit the sudden change to online/remote learning.

**1. Updated Calendar and Assignments to Reflect a Virtual Internship:** The biweekly face-to-face seminars got transferred to Zoom, and weekly reflection prompts were adapted to reflect the virtual internship. Students reflected on the opportunities and challenges of participating in a virtual internship.

2. **Time Logs:** Students were no longer required to document 25 hours of work per week. Each student met with their faculty and site supervisors to determine workable activities for each week. The students kept a list of activities they completed instead of an hourly log. We took the step to ensure that students engaged in meaningful work while diminishing the pressure of meeting the maximum hour requirement.

3. **Professional Development Opportunities:** Most students could not complete 25 hours per week, given the overextension experienced by many of their internship sites and supervisors. To supplement their assigned internship duties, faculty supervisors provided a list of online professional development courses, seminars, and workshops to support student learning and future career plans.

4. **Accountability:** Students completed a template documenting the virtual work they completed for their sites, updates on their family life education project, and plans for professional development weekly. In addition, the faculty met one-on-one with student interns to discuss their internship completion plan and address questions.

5. **A Focus on Self-Care:** Faculty weekly communication with students intentionally centered on self-care. Many students returned to living at home, while others simultaneously took on caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings or elderly family members. We encouraged self-care and changed tasks to ensure that students could attend to the academic requirements and other aspects of their "new normal." We referred to literature within the realm of social work to guide us. Lee and Miller (2013) posited that social practitioners must engage in intentional self-care that leads to an empowered and healthy workforce. The focus should be on work and time management, professional development, social support, and attending to the reactions from work stressors.

6. **Final Project Presentation:** Our interns are asked to present their projects at the end of their internship experience. This is typically organized as a poster symposium that takes place at the end of the semester in which current HDFS students, future student interns, faculty, administrators, and site supervisors are invited to attend. Our program shifted from having a ballroom-like poster symposium to an online poster symposium hosted on Padlet, an internet application that is essentially a virtual bulletin board in which collaborators can create, organize, and share posts that contain text, documents, images, videos among other content (view <https://padlet.com/features>). Students created a poster of their internship project and, upon completion, were required to upload it to Padlet. Not only were their peers able to review and give feedback, but entire faculty, staff, supervisors, and family members viewed the final product of their semester-long internship experience.

### **Observations around Diversity and Inclusion**

Our student population is predominantly White females while 30-80 percent of clients served by the agencies are primarily from Black and Latinx backgrounds (percentage varied by site). For many of the agencies and schools that host interns, the supervisors are also of a minority background. As we wrapped up the Spring semester and prepared for summer and fall internships, we could not ignore the discussions about racial injustice and the protests calling for the dismantling of systemic racism. Inequities in access to health care and technology tools for learning were apparent and noted through anecdotes from discussions with interns. We engaged students in reflection about the disparities they observed for social service providers and

educators who tried to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and communities and schools that were under-resourced. The pandemic further amplified the apparent food insecurity, lack of technology access, and educational opportunities for many children of color (Mitchell, 2020).

We were also keenly aware of how socioeconomic status affected the student interns, who returned to rural communities when residence halls were closed (Mayo & Shethji, 2010). During check-ins, students also shared the challenges they experienced processing the impact of the pandemic and their access to and comfort attending classes from home. Hora et al. (2021) also found similar disparities in their multi-university study. They found that the online interns in our sample were continuing-generation college students with higher GPAs and came from upper-income families. We compiled resources that were available to support students financially and disseminated to all students.

### **Support for Internship Sites**

Several sites reached out to the program for help in finding meaningful activities for interns. We worked closely with our sites to develop purposeful tasks for both students and sites. Our student interns were placed in health care agencies, schools, and non-profit human services agencies. Our greatest challenge was with the health care settings because of the burden that the pandemic placed on health care workers. Many sites focused on planning virtual therapy and creating safe environments for patients and could not spend significant time mentoring interns. As a response, we established tasks that enabled students to continue to support families and children as a result of our collaboration. Resource development tasks dominated these activities; these allowed students to use course content as well as areas within the ten content areas of family life education to support agencies and their clients (see Table 1 for a description of projects completed by students and their corresponding tasks). Some interns could shadow and attend virtual meetings with sites and were resourceful in maintaining contacts over the phone and email with clients for intake and social support. We also encouraged students to use this opportunity to update and enhance cover letters, resumes, personal statements for graduate school, and other professional development opportunities.

### **Products from the Internship**

Although students were disappointed with working virtually, the virtual aspect of these internships enabled us to place greater focus on building skills to provide online support for children and families. As a program, it allowed us to consider teaching Family Life Education online while also providing students an opportunity to practice presenting concepts and delivering products in a virtual format. It forced us to consider ways to develop prevention education materials that could serve as part of online resource libraries for human services agencies, hospitals, and schools (See Table 1). The projects highlighted in Table 1 stem from either students' existing projects or a new project developed in response to going virtual.

### **Site Supervisors' Perspective**

Most of our sites provided online opportunities for students to continue their work but with reduced hours. We did not survey or interview site supervisors about their experience

during the Spring 2020 pivot face-to-face to remote. However, in an unrecorded follow-up supervisor Zoom meeting and based on faculty supervisor's communication with sites, we learn about their experiences with students and the internship. Some agencies allowed students to complete their projects but could not engage students fully because of the uncertainty created by the pandemic and the required adjustments made by their agencies. In addition, site supervisors provided unofficial feedback to the faculty about their concerns and strategies to support the interns. They were impressed with the students' resiliency and the quality of projects they completed. The fundamental challenge for sites was providing adequate work to cover the required internship hours. Sites were relieved that students could complete projects and remained eager to support the program with internships as the pandemic continued. Overall, sites were committed to working with the program to find solutions and activities to engage students remotely for future semesters.

### **Students' Perspective: Challenges and Triumphs**

COVID-19 challenged us, especially with field placements and internships. Students and sites were anxious about how to proceed safely. We wanted students to have a meaningful experience. At the end of the semester, the faculty surveyed students to understand their experiences during the internship. Ninety-three students were assigned in groups of 15-16 to faculty instructors after completing the internship and. All the students were in their final semester of the undergraduate program in HDFS. The questions focused on their experiences pivoting to a remote internship and how they managed to adjust to the change. We sought IRB approval to use the information collected. Although there were 93 students completing their internships in five sections, we used survey results from 20 students in two internship sections supervised by the co-authors. We compared responses across all groups and found similarities.

We engaged in a thematic analysis utilizing open-ended questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We independently reviewed the transcripts using an iterative process to refine the codebook, to ensure the salient text was coded and individual interpretations of each transcript were substantiated. The two analysts independently coded the same transcripts. Identification of any discrepancies in the interpretation of the data or application of the codes were made and resolved, transcripts were recorded as needed, and coding reports were generated. We reviewed information from twenty transcripts that provided the most details about students' experiences. The feedback was positive. Students acknowledged the efforts made by the internship sites and faculty to support them. We generated the following themes from our analyses: Being part of a team, showing empathy, a time of opportunity, and challenges faced by students. We presented selective quotes to match the themes generated and used the letters of the alphabet to identify students. We did not use actual names for pseudonyms because it is likely that the names chosen will be the real names of students in the course, even though they did not receive any attribution.

### **Students' Perspective: Being Part of a Team**

Students appreciated the effort that sites made to keep them connected with the team and to foster collaboration. The importance of being recognized as a team member is captured in the comments here: *My site did an excellent job in keeping me involved and still providing me with opportunities to learn and continue to support the staff (Student A). All my experiences at my site and remotely have been positive. Being able to attend the staff meetings allowed me to better*



*understand what goes on "behind the scenes" and the challenges the staff have been facing having to work from home and how to problem-solve through these uncertain times (Student B).*

Students appreciated being included in emails and other communications with the staff. For example, one student shared that: *Although there was little I could do, I was still included in all emails and conversations. I couldn't help much, but I was still considered a part of the team. I appreciated that. Students also felt that they made valuable contributions to the team (Student G).* One student shared: *My supervisors were so helpful in finding tasks for me to do and making me feel as though I was really making a difference at my site. They allowed me to be a large part of the transition to the virtual museum (Student E).*

Finally, a small number of students preferred the virtual internship over the face-to-face internship with the following statement: *I enjoyed the remote phase of my internship more than my in-person phase because the team at my site reevaluated what needed to be done and I was assigned tasks I really liked (Student C).*

### **Empathy**

The phrase from the High School Musical, 'we are all in this together' resonated well with all students and faculty. The pandemic experience was new, and every stakeholder showed understanding and empathy. The sense of support and empathy were reflected in comments such as: *Some positive experiences from working remotely were having comfort in knowing that my supervisor was going through similar changes and was very understanding of my new daily life (Student J).* Students referenced the support received from faculty members and site supervisors. One student remarked: *Another positive aspect of the remote internship was our faculty supervisors and leaders. They went the extra mile to ensure students felt comfortable and equipped with resources to finish the semester strong (Student M).* Students appreciated the concern and care that faculty showed during the pandemic. We listened more and acknowledged the struggles that students faced.

### **A Time of Opportunity**

Students used the virtual experience to complete their family life education projects for their sites. One student shared: *I mainly focused on finishing the final product for my internship project while working remotely (Student D).* *This allowed me to put forth my best effort on a tool that training presenters will be able to use for years to come.* Student N stated: *during remote work, I got to see the final product of my semester's work come to fruition and that was really rewarding (Student N).*

Another positive outcome for students was the honing and development of soft technology skills, resilience and coping skills, and communication. Some comments included: *I was able to learn how important technology is in society to be able to continue to make organizations function in times like these. I developed time management skills (Student H).* Some students were exposed to Telehealth and Telemental health which was an unintended positive consequence of switching to virtual internships. A student shared delight about *still getting to be a part of the process of their telehealth. Even though we were not shadowing or able to see the virtual visits, my supervisor still let us be a part of the process and allowed our contributions to feel important (Student L).*

## Challenges for Students

The recurring challenges for students were self-care and coping with the pandemic. Students expressed feelings of sadness, disappointment, and loss of social networks during the semester. One student noted the sadness the experience evoked:

*It made me really sad. I loved working in the hospital environment and supporting patients and families. I missed the kids/families, and I knew and worried about one kid, specifically, whose trust I felt like I was just starting to gain (Student Q).* Another noted the challenges associated with a sudden change: *It was super tough mentally; I don't handle fast and big change very well and it took a while to adjust and I'm honestly just glad it's almost over (Student P).*

Other students struggled with staying motivated. *It was difficult to get motivated to complete work but otherwise fine unexpectedly. Since I came home, I have had a very inconsistent schedule with work and family responsibilities that left me worrying about when to complete work. I had to coach myself as well to stay motivated (Student G).* *I knew that I had come too far to give up and that our cohort would get through this challenge, as we have others! While the remote experience was not preferred, I think it really strengthened us as students and allowed us to see what we are capable of (Student A).*

Students expressed disappointment in having to lose direct connection with children they bonded with during the face-to-face portion of the internship. *It was disappointing because the end of the school year is such a fun time in a kindergarten classroom with so many experiential learning days. However, I worked to remain positive and stay grateful for my experience (Student E).* One student described the change as “panic inducing,” she said: *it was hard at first because it was panic-inducing having everything shut down. After the first few weeks, I was able to take care of my mental health and establish routines which made a huge difference, and I am doing well (Student I).*

Many looked forward to starting graduate programs and exploring ways to serve. Comments such as: *the future is a mystery right now, but I look forward to the possibility of what's to come (Student N),* demonstrating that the students were showing resilience in the face of a crisis. Importantly, this is what we want them to model for families as future educators. Another sign of optimism came from this hopeful reflection: *The world hasn't ended. We're still living and breathing. Things are still going (Student C).* Despite the challenges experienced by students, many expressed hope and optimism about the future.

## Discussion

Our goal in this paper was to highlight the processes and experiences that one HDFS program had in response to the pandemic. We provided perspectives from faculty and students and anecdotes from site supervisors. We need more investigation to better understand how to handle remote internships for family sciences programs in the future. In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic forced HDFS programs across the nation to reconsider how they deliver internship and family life education programs. Indeed, this was the case for our program, which comprised 93 interns placed across various sites. Other students and internship programs felt the challenges as described in the results (Harden et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2021).

Our students, faculty, and site supervisors faced multifaceted challenges but mainly emphasized the positive unintended consequences that emerged. We developed intentional guidelines, and suggestions for future virtual internships and sites appreciated the list of potential activities. An additional encouraging outcome of our efforts included our program's success in retaining most of our sites for Spring 2021. An important next step is to conduct research studies to evaluate the structure of the virtual internship and its impact on student learning and the student's sense of preparedness for family and human service careers.

### **Implications for Future Internships**

In making the switch to virtual internships, we learned several lessons. We generated many ideas for future internships and areas to enhance the overall preparation of students before the internship. We provide recommendations that stemmed from the pivot to an online internship because of the pandemic. These suggestions can extend beyond the pandemic to best practices for working with a growing number of online HDFS programs in the field within the United States and consideration for future program changes as we continue to work on internships during and after the pandemic. The suggestions reflect two-family science internship supervisors' experiences and are not entirely the results of empirical research.

### ***Leveraging Technology***

There is a growing need to expand the use of technology in family science programs and internships. With the increase in online family sciences-related programs, we expect to see an increased need for virtual internships. During the pandemic, academic programs expanded the use of technology. They discovered more ways to improve technology and pedagogy with virtual tools such as Web-Ex, Zoom, screen-casting software, portfolios, and website development. We must prepare students to use software and electronic tools to curate materials for family life education before the internship begins. Virtual platforms are necessary to deliver health and human services after the COVID-19 pandemic, and programs must engage in creative adaptation to enhance students' internship experiences (Mitchell et al., 2021).

### ***Reexamining Performance Evaluation***

Before COVID-19, we held face-to-face supervision of interns. The three-way meetings between students-faculty-and-site supervisors made for meaningful dialogue and support of students' development. However, we saw the value of using an online conferencing option to provide supervision and feedback. We realized that online supervision's cost and time savings proved to be a valuable strategy for everyone involved in the internships (See Tobias & Huff, 2016). We also considered how we could help site supervisors assess virtual internships. We assumed that students had difficulty keeping track of their progress when working individually, without supervision. If virtual internships continue, then programs must structure the evaluation to fit with an online experience. We invite other programs to engage in conversations about assessing students during online internships and in response to sudden changes in their educational experience. Programs can use survey tools such as google forms, qualtrics, or survey monkey to facilitate the evaluation. Survey logic can be used to have the triad of student-faculty-agency, rate students' performance. Features such as break-out and waiting rooms in online conferencing tools allow for a discussion between site supervisor and faculty supervisor without having to create multiple meetings. Evaluation criteria such as competence with online tools for

engagement and production of written work are important considerations. Both faculty and site supervisors should discuss what skills and competencies are reasonable for students and assess them as learners rather than experts. Evaluators should schedule adequate time to engage in virtual evaluation and consider ways to set the tone to reflective supportive processes especially when areas for growth are being presented to students online.

### **Leveraging and collaborating with Career Services**

Using the campus Career Services office to help students with career development was integral to our planning and supporting students before and during the pandemic. Although the internship seminar class embeds opportunities to reflect on career goals and plans, students need to access as many resources as possible to boost their career preparation. Career Services can assist with workshops to better prepare students to market their HDFS undergraduate degrees. Intentional partnerships with career services can help students work in virtual environments and develop an awareness of technology skills and online platforms that will prepare them to enter the world of work.

### ***Opportunity to Disseminate family life education content in novel ways***

Both the internship sites and the HDFS program are discussing ways to disseminate resources developed by student interns to the public. The infographics, brochures, website content, manuals, etc., can meet families where they are. The implication for programs is that the teaching of Family Life Education courses should include strategies for developing, disseminating, and evaluating online family life education programs. We presented ideas for internships projects in Table 1. We encourage programs to provide a listing of potential projects that students can complete that will fit both with virtual and face-to-face internships.

### ***Consideration for Full Remote and Hybrid Internships***

Family studies programs could use this learning opportunity to build structures for remote and hybrid internships. An important next step is to engage in assessing the internship experiences from the perspectives of students and sites. Focus groups with sites to discuss possible remote opportunities will help programs identify areas for developing meaningful remote work for students. A benefit of remote internships is that HDFS students might be able to access families and children in rural settings while also aiding in eliminating transportation barriers faced by some students (Feldman, 2021). If remote internship continues, we also encourage careful discussion and planning to assist students and sites in allocating tasks for interns suited for online work. Remote internships should employ a sensible framework for weekly check-ins, mentorship, and feedback. Hora et al. (2021) recommended that programs must seek to “improve task design, supervision, and communication”. If an online internship is to provide students with remote working skills, which one student called “the future of work,” then employers and academic advisors will need to improve how online experiences model and cultivate these skills (p.6).

### ***Prioritizing Self-care and Self-advocacy for Students***

The pandemic laid bare the mental health and financial challenges that college students face. Family studies programs should continue to support the mental health needs of students. The pandemic amplified existing anxieties, depression, and career uncertainty that the students

faced. Pre-internship and internship seminar classes need to include content and resources for engaging in self-care and mindfulness. Programs may consider having weekly international check-ins with students using online platforms and polls to gauge students' experiences. We also recommend having conversations with sites about the mental health needs of students and the competing demands of the internship, additional coursework, and personal challenges that college students experience. We believe that being intentional about the challenges faced by students will help agencies better understand the needs of students (Lee & Miller, 2013). We also encourage programs to work with the student counseling office to provide workshops and strategies to help students cope. Training for faculty to better understand the mental health needs of students is also important. Lee and Miller (2013) provided suggestions for supporting self-care debriefing about reactions to stressors, mindfulness activities, journaling, professional support that includes constructive feedback and guidance, and building a network of resources to support the practitioner. It is also important to find ways to revitalize students interns as they serve in the dual roles of intern and student.

### ***Inclusion and Diversity***

The pandemic provided another palpable example of our society's inequities and health disparities across various sociodemographic factors (Stokes et al., 2020). As such, it presented both a challenge and an opportunity to further consider how effective we, as a family science field, are in preparing students to work with diverse populations for their internships and beyond. As we ponder the changing landscape of internships, particularly the adjustment to remote internships, access and opportunity for minoritized students, families, and underserved communities need to be considered. Our assignments and plans should aim to be diverse, inclusive, and equitable. Case studies, discussion prompts, and training addressing issues of diversity and equity should continue.

It is also important to consider how students of color are affected by current events. For example, at a national level, low-income students were the most likely to drop out or not enroll at all in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic (Sedmark, 2020). The lower enrollment figures were a testament to economic devastation unleashed by the coronavirus crisis and its heavier impact on lower-income Americans and minority populations, who suffered higher levels of unemployment and a higher incidence of COVID-19. Noteworthy, when low-income students stop attending school, it is rare that they make a return (Shapiro et al., 2019). The long-term consequences include diminished job and wage prospects for the rest of their lives. For classes with a small percentage of students of color, instructors may consider creating safe spaces that enable students to share issues affecting them. Within these safe spaces, students may find a place to articulate challenges with navigating home and school responsibilities in addition to other personal challenges in which general class space may not be conducive to sharing. Perhaps offering one-on-one meetings may give opportunities for students to engage in discussions with faculty around concerns, obstacles, and potential solutions. In this way, faculty also have an opportunity to learn of potential student needs and have the ability to offer support, including making referrals to on- and off-campus supports as needed.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

There are several strengths to the narratives and reflections provided in this paper. We used the perspectives of two internship faculty supervisors and students in this analysis to shed

light on the processes involved in pivoting to virtual internships considering a global pandemic (i.e., COVID-19) unlike none seen in our lifetime. There are also limitations to be acknowledged. The intended goal of the data collection was for program use and not for empirical research. Our intent for writing this manuscript was to share the perspective of one program in hopes that others might gain helpful insights for their programs and efforts. It is not intended to be generalizable to all family science programs and internships, although considerations for how our efforts might be applicable are presented. The sample was homogenous, with 90 percent of students being white females. We need more empirical research to better understand the triadic relationship between faculty, student, and site supervisors/agency for online internships. Future research should consider information about communication, use of technology for virtual internships, and designing online family life education programs. The experiences described are specific to one academic program and about 20 percent of their interns, therefore, generalizations from these initial observations and experiences are not possible.

The authors also acknowledge that the program director and internship coordinator who led the program's transition during this crisis is a co-author on the paper. Therefore, her positionality could introduce bias in the analysis. We also recognize that the structure of internships varies by program and that our successful pivot might not have been the experience for many programs. We believe that our success was because of the close relationships we have with sites/partners. There are existing campus-community partnerships through various institutes and a large teaching hospital that serve internship placements for the program. The HDFS program director also serves as the internship coordinator in a 12 month position that allows her time to engage with community partners. The internship coordinator plays an imperative and central role in setting up internships; work that includes holding on-campus events for supervisors. Therefore, we believe this familiarity allowed our program and sites to adjust with greater ease in light of the circumstances.

Our students expressed gratitude for the modifications made by the program and had minor complaints about their sites. In addition, our faculty supervisors were already using teleconferencing technologies to support the internship, and that made the transition easier to manage. Our school makes a significant financial investment with course releases and financial resources to hold partnership events throughout the year. We recognize that this might not be the case for other programs.

### **Conclusion**

Internships will continue to be an important part of training our undergraduate and graduate students within our family science programs. We expect that there will be more need for virtual/remote internships in the future. Careful planning will allow programs to develop and provide meaningful internships for family life educators and family science programs. We encourage programs to assess their current strategies through a lens of diversity and inclusion, 21st-century career preparedness, and student wellness.

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**Appendix A**

**Description of Projects Completed by Students**

Type of Internship Site	Description of Remote Duties	Description of Projects and Products	Family Life Education Content Area
Women’s Commission (Advocacy for Women)	Project 1. Compile resources in the city and surrounding areas to meet family needs	Project 1: A resource booklet made available in both soft and hardcopies	Family Resource Management
	Project 2. Create Black Girl magic online posters	Project 2: A virtual showcase of successful Black women used to increase representation for young girls in the community.	Families in Society
Club Nova (Mental Health for Adults)	Conduct a needs assessment for clients focused on needs of adults with mental health challenges, disabilities, and reducing recidivism for those who are incarcerated	A written report with detailed job description sheets to increase the accessibility of tasks around the clubhouse with suggestions focused on building the esteem of clients and giving them agency over the mental health support they received from the club.	Interpersonal Communication Internal Family Dynamics
Unofficial Child Life Internship	Conduct needs assessment with supervisor and Pediatric Diabetes Education team at UNC Children’s Hospital to investigate current education models and resources used around the world, as well as in other departments at UNC Children’s Hospital	Created <i>My Diabetes Education Workbook</i> , a comprehensive and interactive educational resource for children in kindergarten through grade 5 who were being treated for Type I Diabetes at UNC Children’s Hospital. To meet the three objectives (inclusion, education, and empowerment), the workbook consisted of 3 overview sections: personal, diabetes, and coping.	Internal Family Dynamics Human Growth & Development
The Women’s Health Education Center (WHEC)	Design projects to improve the effectiveness of the sibling’s tour at UNC Women’s Hospital’s WHEC while indirectly improving sibling adjustment to a newborn	Created a coloring book/mini story book for siblings. Developed materials and guides for parents focused on helping navigate sibling rivalry, tips for preventing sibling rivalry, and promoting positive relationships between siblings starting from a younger age.	Parenting Education. Internal Family Dynamics
Planned Parenthood	Create resources to broaden the scope of sex education received by students	Co-delivered sex education classes at the library and select schools (middle and high school). Developed activities and scripts to facilitate workshops. Developed an online resource for students to access all anonymous questions and answers related to puberty and sex.	Human Sexuality Family Life Education

<p>Refugee Wellness Program</p>	<p>Refugee Supports</p>	<p>Adapt commonly known charts to explain IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) to fit the needs of Burmese Women.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Cycle of Violence</li> <li>•Power and Control Wheel</li> <li>•Immigrant Power and Control Wheel</li> <li>•Equality Wheel</li> </ul> </p>	<p>Families in Society                      Internal Family Dynamics</p>
<p>City Health Department</p>	<p>Family Planning Media Resources</p>	<p>Located all Family Planning media resources in the community and revised information to accurately represent the entire patient population served by the clinic. Shared information with local, middle school and high school nurses to increase the number of adolescent patients receiving contraceptives.</p>	<p>Human Sexuality                      Family Resource Management</p>
<p>Birthing Center</p>	<p>Develop doula care tips for non-English speaking clients at the birthing center</p>	<p>Created materials and videos about accessing interpretation services at UNC Hospital and other psychosocial supports for non-English speaking mothers. A special emphasis was placed on the issue of linguistic rights violations infringing upon refugee and other linguistic minority patients' access to quality care</p>	<p>Human Growth &amp; Development</p>

*Note.* The table documents some of the activities that students were able to complete virtually. In the situations where the plans for delivering a Family Life Education program or related activity were brought to a standstill, written instructions were left to help a future intern or the site to continue the work.