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Development of a Doctoral Internship Program for Walden's Journals

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Problem

A challenge facing all doctoral students is to learn to write with a **scholarly voice**, so that they can be successful in academic careers. A question arose about whether participation in a doctoral internship program for Walden's 4 journals would improve interns' research skills, writing skills, writing efficacy, and knowledge of the publication process.

Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to develop a doctoral internship program for Walden's 4 journals and evaluate its effect on student participants' scholarly skills.

Significance

Many postgraduate academic faculty positions require that new graduates have professional publications. Yet, the prospect of writing for publication engenders anxiety among graduate and postgraduate students who find the processes involved in becoming published to be mysterious and daunting (Cuthbert & Spark, 2008; Kamler, 2008; Lassig et al, 2013).

However, there has been little research on strategies to ease the transition into publishing. In order to provide doctoral students insights into the publication experience and guidance in scholarly writing, the present study examined how identities as scholarly writers can develop within a group of doctoral interns for Walden University's 4 professional journals.

Social Change Implications

Programs, such as the current journal internship, offer the opportunity for students to gain valuable professional experience and learn the logistics of journal publishing, thus allowing for better dissemination of doctoral research at Walden that focuses on supporting social change.

Relevant Scholarship

Virtual doctoral students (as at Walden University) tend to experience **isolation** (Yalof, 2014) and a **sense of disconnect** with their institution (Sutton, 2014).

Common to all doctoral students, they also experience **difficulties writing** in a scholarly style (Klocko, Marshall, & Davidson, 2015), **anxiety** and a **lack of understanding** as to how to publish their research, which is required for future academic faculty positions (Stoilescu & McDougall, 2010).

Research Questions

1. Is there a change in interns' **research skills** between the start and end of the 6-months internship?
2. Is there a change in interns' **writing skills** between the start and end of the 6-months internship?
3. Is there a change in interns' **writing efficacy** between the start and end of the 6-months internship?
4. Is there a change in interns' **knowledge of publication process** between the start and end of the 6-months internship?

Participants

A total of **250 doctoral students** applied for the program, and **28 interns** were randomly selected to participate in the program (7 for each journal). Only 22 students completed the internship program, however.

Procedures

In April 2017, an internship program was begun for Walden's four journals: *Journal of Social Change*; *Journal of Social, Behavioral, and Health Sciences*; *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*; and *International Journal of Applied Management and Technology*. To recruit potential doctoral interns, notices were placed in all of Walden's dissertation classrooms by the Center for Research Quality.

All interns were asked to complete a series of surveys at the beginning and at 6 months, receiving a \$10 gift card each time. All interns attended a monthly webinar in which issues related to manuscript reviewing were discussed. The interns completed a manuscript review for their assigned journal every 3 weeks and a critique of their review as compared to all other reviewers.

Procedures, cont.

The interns completed 6 reviews during the internship. For added support, interns were also asked to participate in a texting group using the GroupMe app. Editors of the journals supervised the interns' performance and provided feedback on their reviews. Each editor received a monthly thank you of a \$50 gift card.

Survey measures included:

- **Research Appraisal Inventory** (modified; Stadtlander, Giles & Sickel, 2013). This measure examines each step in the dissertation/ writing process and asks the participant to rate their ability from beginner to expert. Scores may range from a low of 46 to a high of 230.
- **Doctoral Writing Knowledge and Efficacy Inventory (DWKEI)** (Stadtlander & Sickel, 2017) consists of 2 parts, a 42-question knowledge portion (range of scores from 0-42) and a 24 self-efficacy portion (range of scores 24-120).
- **Assessment of Knowledge of the Publication Process**. An 18-item survey examining issues of the publication process was designed by the PIs with input from the editors of Walden's journals (range of scores 0-18)

Analyses and Findings

Research Appraisal Inventory. A paired *t*-test of interns' scores indicated their perceived research skills improved significantly between pre ($M = 92.8$) and post ($M = 154.5$) internship ($t(21) = 9.29, p < .001$). Cronbach's pre/post = .98 /.98

DWKEI. Pre/post Cronbach's alphas were .62/.70 for the DWKEI and .92/.95 for the self-efficacy questions. A paired *t*-test of interns' writing knowledge scores was not significant, but interns' writing self efficacy for pre ($M = 80.38$) and post was significantly improved ($M = 95.3$; $t(20) = 6.36, p < .001$).

Knowledge of Publication Process. Cronbach's alphas were too low for further analysis (pre/ post = .36/ .47), suggesting a need to reexamine the measurement instrument.

Correlations (post study). Writing self-efficacy was correlated with research knowledge ($r(22) = .439, p = .04$), this finding suggests that the increased score in judgement of research skills may be related to the change in self-efficacy.

Interpretation

The journal interns improved on multiple measures, including writing self-efficacy and research skills, which seemed to be related constructs. However, they did not significantly improve on writing knowledge. The greatest benefit of the internship appeared to be an increase in self efficacy.

Limitations

More capable and motivated students were likely to have self-selected to participate in this program. Further, 6 interns did not complete the internship. It is possible that people with marginal writing skills became frustrated and dropped out.

The inventories are Walden-centric, and may not apply to other programs. The knowledge measure needs to be examined more closely with factor analysis.

The 4 editors each managed the interns their own way, which may have impacted interns' outcomes.

Recommendations

As a strategy to support student achievement, offering doctoral students a supervised experience in the journal review process, while they are students, would appear to be supportive of student ability to complete their degree, and potential success as a scholar afterwards. This approach was logistically challenging however, and places added burden on journal editors for tasks beyond the traditional editorial role.

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