


2016

# An Evaluation of an American Sign Language Interpreting Internship Program

Colleen Avilla Geier  
*Walden University*

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Colleen Geier

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

An Evaluation of an American Sign Language Interpreting Internship Program

by

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MSEd, State University of New York College at Brockport 1994

BA, State University of New York College at Brockport 1982

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2016

## Abstract

This study was a program evaluation of an American Sign Language internship program that was established in 2006 at a 4-year private college in the Midwestern United States but had never been evaluated. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of this internship program in preparing students for employment in the field of interpreting. An expertise-oriented program evaluation case study was conducted using the lens of experiential learning theory. Research questions were used to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the program and the ways in which the policies, objectives, and assignments prepare students to work as interns and later as professional interpreters. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 2 former administrators who helped establish the program, 13 graduates of the program between 2013 and 2015, and 8 of the internship site directors who worked with interns between 2013 and 2015. The interview data were coded and analyzed following Merriam's approach to identify themes, and document review was used to support the themes. Key findings were that the program provided effective training for interns transitioning to professional employment, but students tended to lack self-confidence in their performances. Interviewees also indicated that program documents were helpful but difficult to use, and mentors needed guidance in giving constructive feedback. An evaluation report was constructed as a research project deliverable to provide specific recommendations for program enhancement. The study promotes positive social change by providing stakeholders with the evidence-based data needed to implement further growth for the internship program, and to more effectively train interpreters to work with the Deaf community.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work first to my students. Teaching them to become interpreters has made me a much better interpreter, guiding them in their journey has made my journey so much richer. I also dedicate this to my dear friend David, who helped me get started in the field of interpreting and has been a trusted companion and confidant for more years than either of us would like to count. You have inspired me and challenged me, and more than anything you have made me laugh!

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Sometimes it seems like I travel through life alone, yet there are many people who walk beside me, or behind me picking up the pieces, or in front of me guiding the way. My sister, Sharon, is the rock our family is built upon. She has always been my guide; modeling what a strong, beautiful, and loving woman should be. Thank you for holding me up in the hardest times and laughing with me in the joyful times.

My brother Lenny was the first to attend college and showed me it was possible, thank you for being a role model. My parents and my brother Bobby have gone home ahead of us, but all that they taught me lives on and their love is still felt. And of course Melanie, my “Ooch”, is the closest thing I have to a daughter and she has my heart! Above all, my father lived a life of unconditional love, and his love sustains me still.

I have been blessed to share my life with amazing friends, Ernie and Kathy. They have been with me through my BA, my MS, and now my doctorate. They have become family and have shared their family with me. When other friends have come and gone, these two have been constant companions even when we live hundreds of miles apart. You have added so much to my life!

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
List of Figures .....	vi
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem .....	3
The Local Problem.....	4
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	5
Definition of Terms.....	7
Significance.....	9
Guiding/Research Question .....	10
Review of the Literature .....	11
Program Evaluation Model.....	12
Theoretical Framework.....	13
The History of Interpreter Education in the United States .....	16
The Gap.....	19
Internships in Interpreter Education Programs .....	21
Internships in Related Occupations .....	22
Implications.....	24
Summary .....	26
Section 2: The Methodology.....	28



Introduction.....	28
Qualitative Research Design and Approach .....	28
Research Questions.....	29
Rationale for Research Design.....	30
Participants.....	31
Interview Procedures .....	33
Protection of Human Subjects .....	33
Data Collection .....	34
Document Analysis.....	34
Interviews.....	35
Storing and Handling Data.....	36
Role of the Researcher .....	36
Potential Bias .....	37
Data Analysis.....	38
Procedures for Data Analysis.....	39
Interviews.....	40
Document Analysis.....	40
Findings.....	41
Documents .....	41
Recommendations.....	43
Interviews.....	45
Summary of Findings.....	72

Credibility and Trustworthiness.....	74
Assumptions.....	75
Limitations .....	75
Project Deliverable.....	76
Conclusion .....	77
Section 3: The Project.....	78
Introduction.....	78
Description and Goals.....	79
Rationale .....	79
Review of the Literature .....	81
Experiential Learning Theory.....	83
Program Evaluations.....	85
Implementation .....	88
Project Evaluation.....	89
Implications Including Social Change.....	90
Local Community .....	90
Far-Reaching.....	91
Conclusion .....	92
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	93
Introduction.....	93
Project Strengths .....	93
Limitations .....	94

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches .....	95
Scholarship.....	95
Project Development and Evaluation.....	97
Leadership and Change.....	97
Analysis of Self as Scholar .....	98
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	98
Analysis of Self as Project Developer .....	99
The Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change.....	100
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	101
Conclusion .....	102
References.....	103
Appendix A: Project .....	118
Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Agency Directors .....	137
Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Former Administrators.....	138
Appendix D: Interview Protocol for Former Interns .....	139
Appendix E: Document Review Instrument.....	140

## List of Tables

Table 1 Structural Coding Example.....	46
Table 2 Descriptive Coding Example.....	47
Table 3 In Vivo Coding Example.....	47
Table 4 Emotion Coding Example.....	48
Table 5 Category Inclusion Rules.....	49
Table 6 Themes.....	50
Table A1 Summary of Recommendations.....	134

## List of Figures

Figure 1 A schematic showing how experiential learning is used in ASL interpreter education .....	14
Figure 2 A schematic showing a proposed evaluation and re-evaluation of an ASL interpreting internship program. ....	87
Figure 3 A schematic showing the proposed formative and summative feedback loop used for the internship program. ....	90

## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

This study is an expertise oriented program evaluation of the American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting internship program at a 4-year private, faith-based college in the Midwest, hereafter referred to as ABC College (pseudonym). This college established an ASL interpreting major in 2002 and the first group of students participated in an internship during the spring of 2006. Since that time the internship program has never been formally evaluated. The purpose of this study was therefore to evaluate the effectiveness of this internship program in preparing students for employment in the field of interpreting.

The profession of ASL interpreting is a relatively new field despite there having been volunteer interpreters throughout history (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007; Shaffer, 2013). Bontempo (2013) described the profession as being past infancy, but not yet mature. Until the inception of academic interpreter training programs in the United States during the 1970s, sign language interpreters entered the profession by invitation from the Deaf community (Mathers & Witter-Merithew, 2014; Shaw, 2014). Members of the Deaf community would identify someone with potential, often a person with Deaf parents who had been signing all of their lives, and encourage them to start interpreting in various settings. Hunt and Nicodemus (2014) described the informal evaluation of a person's sign language skills by the Deaf community as the vetting process by which people entered the profession prior to the 1970s. Witter-Merithew (2013) described the honor of being extended this special invitation.

The passage of the *Vocational Rehabilitation Act (PL 89-333)* in 1965, the *Rehabilitation Act (PL 93-112)* in 1973, and the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142)* in 1975 greatly increased the need for sign language interpreters in the United States (Shaffer, 2013; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). This need for interpreters in the community and in educational settings led to the development of interpreter training programs. In the early 1970s, colleges across the United States offered short intensive programs during the summer over a 6-10-week period (Witter-Merithew, 2013). With the critical need for interpreters, community colleges began offering associates degrees and eventually some baccalaureate degree programs were developed (Furmanek, 2014; Godfrey, 2011). As of 2014, there were approximately 150 postsecondary ASL interpreting programs across the United States (Hunt & Nicodemus, 2014).

Since the establishment of academic interpreting programs, there has been research about interpreter education, but little agreement about how to help students emerge with the competencies they need to begin professional employment (Angelelli, 2013; Godfrey, 2011; Winston, 2013). Interpreter training programs have changed little since they began, in spite of studies outlining the needs of interpreting students (Taylor, M., 2013). One such study was the Entry-to-Practice Competencies Project developed by Witter-Merithew and Johnson in 2005. This project involved discussions with approximately 400 stakeholders and resulted in a list of 34 competencies which these stakeholders believed to be essential for effective interpreting (Winston, 2013; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005).

Several specific recommendations for improving interpreting programs have been identified in the literature. These include entrance and exit criteria for interpreter education programs (Winston, 2013), engaging students in self-reflection and critical thinking skills, and developing students' ability to assess their own work (Elliott & Hall, 2014). The primary identified need is for more hands-on experience and, specifically, supervised internships (Godfrey, 2011; Humphrey, 2015; Meadows, 2013; Wang, 2015). When interpreters were extended the invitation by the Deaf community they were taught and mentored along the way, but this community mentoring was largely lost when interpreter education shifted into the academic arena. (Elliott & Hall, 2014). Classroom learning cannot fully replace the sense of apprenticeship in community mentoring; therefore it is important for instructors to find ways to include members of the Deaf community as mentors (Jankowski, 2014; Rowley & Kovacs-Houlihan, 2014). Internships also provide students the opportunity to work alongside professional interpreters and receive feedback from Deaf clients (Godfrey, 2011; Humphrey, 2015).

### **Definition of the Problem**

American Sign Language interpreter training programs have focused on theory and ethics without providing enough opportunity for useful, hands-on training (Ruiz, 2013). As a result, only students who enter ASL interpreter training programs with very strong sign language skills are able to pass certification exams immediately after graduation (Mikkelson, 2013). Students who lack these skills on matriculation frequently need three to five years of experience after graduation before being ready to pass national certification (James & Gabriel, 2013; Schafer, 2011; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005).



These new interpreters who do not have the necessary interpreting skills to pass certification exams are unable to adequately meet the needs of the Deaf community.

Godfrey (2011) described this problem of students graduating without the necessary skills to enter the workforce as the readiness-to-work gap. Godfrey further defined the readiness-to-credential gap in this context as students graduating with basic interpreting skills and the able to do some interpreting assignments, but not having the skill required to be credentialed at the state or national level. Graduates from interpreter training programs who did not matriculate with strong sign language skills may be able to start working if their state does not require further credentialing; however, they are rarely ready to earn state or national credentials (Godfrey, 2011). Students must be actively engaged in their own learning, including out-of-class activities and practice (Taylor, M., 2013). Community-based practice and supervised internships are some ways to reduce the readiness-to-credential gap (Godfrey, 2011; Humphrey, 2015).

### **The Local Problem**

The ASL Interpreting major at ABC College has been in existence since 2002. At the time of this study, students pursuing this major followed a program of study including courses in ethics, ASL, North American Deaf Culture, ASL Linguistics, as well as four interpreting skills courses: Interpreting I, Interpreting II, Interpreting III, and Transliterating. The college website described the capstone experience for this 4-year program as a 12-week internship where each student works alongside one or more on-site mentors. The primary goal of the internship program is to provide a successful transition from classroom learning to employment after graduation. However, there is no

standardized system to monitor the effectiveness of the internship program in preparing students for professional employment. The college faculty and internship director talked with stakeholders each year asking what was effective and what was not effective during the internship semester, however, no systematic documentation of interviews with stakeholders had been done until this study.

The purpose of this program evaluation was to evaluate the effectiveness of the internship program. Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2011) described program evaluations as reviewing the goals, objectives, and activities of a program in order to determine the effectiveness of that program and to provide feedback to the client. An expertise-oriented approach, which I selected, is among the oldest forms of formal evaluations (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). While all types of program evaluation use professional judgment to some degree, the expertise-oriented approach uses professional judgment as the main strategy for evaluating the quality of a program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011), which was desirable in this study. I also utilized a program evaluation approach to make recommendations to improve the program and allow administrators and faculty to implement change fairly quickly, in alignment with recommendations by Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) and Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010).

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

The readiness-to-work gap in sign language interpreting was first identified as a crisis by Anderson and Stauffer (1990). This concept is used to describe students who graduate with a degree or certificate in sign language interpreting but do not have adequate skills to actually work as a professional interpreter (Godfrey, 2011). Interpreter

training programs have advanced from short summer programs to associate degree and baccalaureate degree programs, but little has been done to reduce the gap: Mathers and Witter-Merithew (2014) reported that the gap is still prevalent in the majority of new interpreters moving from the classroom to professional practice.

As more Deaf individuals find employment, attend college, and become professionals, the expectations for interpreters' skill continues to rise (Taylor, M. M., 2013). However, interpreter training programs are not adequately preparing students; James and Gabriel (2012) reported the general perception is that interpreting programs do not prepare students for the profession and most recent graduates perform poorly on standardized certification tests. According to Mikkelson (2013), only students who enter a training program with strong sign language skills are likely to pass certification tests soon after graduation. Mikkelson further recommended mentoring as a way to reduce the disconnect between the theoretical training provided in interpreting programs and the actual demands of the profession.

While other professions expect students to graduate from college or training programs ready to work, the interpreting profession has continued to experience this readiness-to-work gap (Mathers & Witter-Merithew, 2014). For example, Bentley-Sassaman, Houser, and Morrison (2014) reported that most graduates from interpreting programs were unable to achieve the required state of Pennsylvania score of 3.5 out of five possible levels on the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment. Schafer (2012) noted that the entry to practice competencies developed by Witter-Merithew and Johnson in 2005 are considered desirable, but that most graduates of interpreting

programs are not proficient in these competencies. The decades-old acceptance by the Deaf community and hiring entities of less than qualified graduates entering the field continues to be prevalent (Mathers & Witter-Merithew, 2014). This lack of skill among interpreters constitutes a significant problem for Deaf individuals who rely on interpreters for communication access.

### **Definition of Terms**

*The American Sign Language Teachers' Association (ASLTA).* ASLTA is a professional organization which offers training, support, and certification for teachers of American Sign Language (ASL Teachers Association, 2014).

*Certification.* The process of demonstrating a set of competencies for credentialing (Mikkelson, 2013). In the interpreting profession, certification generally refers to national certification achieved through testing with the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf or Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment for educational interpreters.

*Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT).* CIT is a professional organization dedicated to the education of interpreters. Primarily CIT works with interpreters working between English and American Sign Language (Conference of Interpreter Trainers, n.d.).

*Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE).* CCIE is the national accreditation board for interpreter education programs (Commission on College Interpreter Education, 2014).

*Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA)*. The EIPA is a nationally recognized evaluation of interpreting skills in the K-12 educational environment (EIPA, n.d.).

*Entry-to-Practice Competencies*. The 34 specific competencies needed for effective interpreting listed by the Entry-to-Practice Competencies Project (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005).

*Interpreter Education Program (IEP)*. A term for educational programs for interpreters. It is often used in place of ITP. IEP programs may be associates, baccalaureate, or master's degree programs (About Interpreter Education Programs, 2015).

*Interpreter Training Program (ITP)*. A term used interchangeably with IEP

*Licensure*. Licensure is another way for a person to be considered credentialed. Licensure generally is authorization granted by a government agency for a specified period of time (Mikkelson, 2013). Many states have developed interpreting licensure laws. A state may require some type of testing or certification, or may only require the interpreter to register with the state to obtain a state license (Regulations Governing Interpreter Requirements, State-by-State, n.d.).

*National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC)*. A collaboration between six federally funded interpreter education centers that provides tools and resources for interpreter training programs (National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers, n.d.).

*National Interpreter Certification (NIC):* The testing process for the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2013).

*Readiness-to-credential gap:* A state encountered by students who graduate with a degree in interpreting but are not skilled enough to qualify for national- or state-level credentials (Godfrey, 2011).

*Readiness-to-work gap:* A state encountered by students who graduate with a degree in interpreting but do not have the necessary skills to work as a professional interpreter (Godfrey, 2011).

*Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID):* The national organization for sign language interpreters (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2013).

### **Significance**

Ways that have been used to help students develop their interpreting skills include experiential learning, community and campus-wide practice, and supervised internships (Godfrey, 2011; Green & Ballard, 2011; Humphrey, 2015). The purpose of this study was to evaluate the internship program within an interpreting major of a 4-year college. This evaluation was important because it was not clear if the internship program at the study site was effective at developing student skills in interpreting.

Observing working interpreters and having opportunities to shadow interpreters is important because it allows the transmission of knowledge from master to novice (Humphrey, 2015). Internships also give students the opportunity to work with professional interpreters as they develop their skills and professional attitudes (Godfrey, 2011; Humphrey, 2015). The internship experience ideally provides opportunities for

students to review ethical dilemmas in the context of actual interpreting assignments and with the support of their mentors. With no previous formal evaluation, it was not clear if interns had the opportunity to discuss such ethical dilemmas during the internship semester.

### **Guiding/Research Question**

Since the beginning of interpreter training, research has been done to identify what knowledge and skills entry-level interpreters need to be successful in the profession (Mikkelson, 2014; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). This research indicates that interpreting students generally do not have enough hands-on experience in their training programs. The need for supervised practicum or intern experiences is well documented and yet the curriculum of interpreting programs has changed very little (Humphrey, 2015).

The interpreting program at ABC College includes an internship during the senior year. This program was established in 2002 with the first internship taking place in 2006; however, at the time of this study, there had not been any formal evaluation of the internship program. Without evaluation data, it was difficult to identify what is effective in the program or to justify any changes. I therefore chose to conduct a program evaluation to fill this knowledge gap and to give the program faculty needed data and enable them to recognize the effectiveness of the program and to make recommendations to the college for any needed changes to the internship (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Spaulding, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the internship program within an ASL Interpreting major at a four-year college. It was specifically designed to answer three qualitative research questions:

- RQ1: What do the stakeholders describe as the strengths and weaknesses of the internship program?
- RQ2: In what ways do the policies, objectives, and assignments of the internship program, as presented in the Internship Manual, prepare students to work as an intern?
- RQ3: In what ways does the internship program prepare students for employment as professional sign language interpreters?

### **Review of the Literature**

A literature review was conducted retrieving articles and studies from ERIC, ProQuest Central, Google Scholar, and SAGE. In addition to a search for literature related to interpreter education, a search was done for experiential learning theory, as well as internship programs in other professions. Keywords included *ASL interpreting, interpreter education, interpreter training programs, internship, practicum, and experiential learning theory*.

The literature review is divided into six subsections: Program Evaluation Model, Theoretical Framework, The History of Interpreter Education in the United States, The Gap, Internships in Interpreter Education Programs, and Internships in Related Occupations.



## **Program Evaluation Model**

Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006) argued that programs should produce tangible results and should be modified or discontinued if they do not. Stakeholders and decision makers within an agency, therefore, need data to ascertain if a program is producing appropriate results and to determine what changes might need to be made. Several types of program evaluations were researched for this study including objectives-oriented, decision-oriented, and expertise-oriented evaluation approaches (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

In an objectives-oriented evaluation, the researcher uses existing program objectives, or works with stakeholders to develop objectives before evaluating a program to see if the objectives were being met and to what extent (Lodico et al., 2010). Objectives-oriented evaluations have been used extensively in education research, including in the development of criterion-referenced testing and for *No Child Left Behind* legislation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). One concern with this approach is that evaluators may become overly focused on specific objectives and miss the other benefits or concerns of the program (Lodico et al., 2010).

In a decision-oriented evaluation, the researcher would seek to serve the stakeholders in making decisions about the program. The Context Input Process Product (CIPP) evaluation model, developed in 1973, is a commonly used type of decision-oriented evaluation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). This model can be used in formative evaluations for developing or implementing a program, or for summative evaluations used for evaluating the outcome of a program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Two criticisms of decision-oriented evaluations are that there is too much focus on decision-making and the

assumption that the program will remain stable during the evaluation which is often not possible. Fitzpatrick et al. (2011) noted that the assumptions underlying this evaluation model are disputable and an evaluator must be prepared to reassess and make changes during the evaluation.

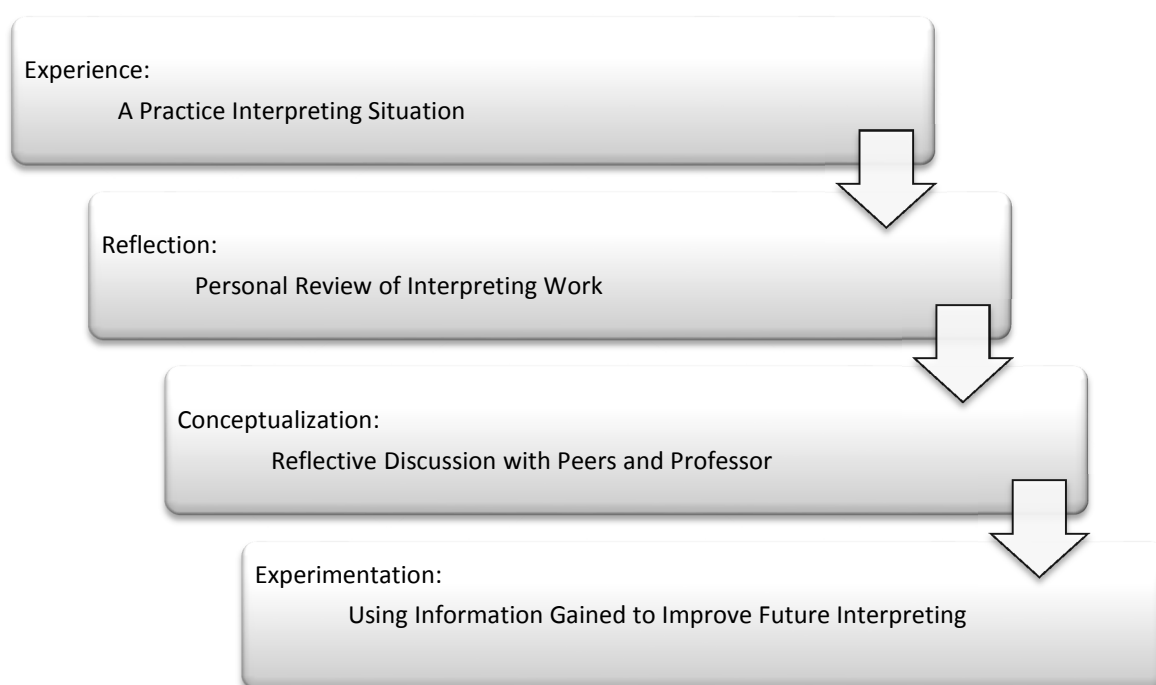
An expertise-oriented evaluation method was used in conducting this study. This type of evaluation method is used in many professions including law, medicine, and in the accreditation of institutions of higher education (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011; Lodico et al., 2010). Expertise-oriented evaluations use content experts to review data and judge the performance of the program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Ad hoc individual evaluations use a consultant or industry expert to review the program and make recommendations for improvement (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). The role of an expertise-oriented evaluator can be likened to a connoisseur who understands the complexity of observing real-world situations and therefore knows what to look for because of extensive experience in the field (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was experiential learning theory. Experiential learning began with the work of John Dewey and Jean Piaget but was further developed and popularized by David Kolb (Ruiz, 2013). Kolb described learning as a four stage process (Manolis, Burns, Assudani, & Chinta, 2013). Manolis et. al. (2013) noted that traditional views of education saw students as identical empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge and did not consider individual differences in learning. Kolb described learning as a process rather than a set of outcomes. Learning is a holistic

process of adaptation grounded in experience and therefore creates knowledge (Manolis et al., 2013). Kolb's model included four learning modes: Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Active Experimentation (AE) (Chan, 2012). Figure 1 demonstrates how experiential learning may be applied to ASL interpreting education.

*Figure 1. Experiential Learning Used in Sign Language Interpreter Education*



*Figure 1* A schematic showing how experiential learning is used in ASL interpreter education.

Although experiential learning is considered transformative, colleges and universities have been reluctant to embrace this theory (Green & Ballard, 2011). Employers, however, are seeking graduates who have the kind of knowledge and confidence that can be gained through experiential learning (Chan, 2012). Shaw (2013) urged educators to teach using reflection in order to effectively use experiential learning

in higher education. This is important because experiential learning allows students to evolve from initial uncertainty to knowledge and understanding, and finally to a sense of self-actualization (Shaw, 2013). This process enables individuals to self-evaluate and improve their skills and performance without reliance on feedback from a supervisor and culminates with the individual being able to use self-reflection to evaluate and improve their own work (Brown, 2013).

Dean and Pollard (2012) stated that there must be a balance between teacher directed learning and student independence. Rather than focus on teacher-centered learning or student-centered learning, a subject-centered philosophy including experiential and reflective learning practices allows for a greater balance between teacher and student-centered approaches. (Dean & Pollard, 2012). Bentley-Sassaman (2009) suggested that interpreting programs should give students a sense of their future career through experiential learning in the classroom and during internship.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how the experience of a 12-week supervised internship prepares students for professional employment after graduation. Experiential learning theory is used throughout the ASL Interpreting major and specifically during the capstone internship experience. As Chan (2012) pointed out, employers look for applicants who are able to demonstrate skills learned through experience. The interview questions for graduates and internship site directors are designed to gain information about the experiences interns had as well as the methods used to mentor them. Since the internship semester takes place in cities throughout the country, faculty at the college have limited direct impact on the experience.

## **The History of Interpreter Education in the United States**

The training of sign language interpreters in the United States has undergone significant change. Until the 1970s, interpreters were family members and friends who undertook the responsibility on a voluntary basis (Cokely & Witter-Merithew, 2015). Government grants helped to establish the first interpreter training programs in the early 1970s which removed the assessment and training of interpreters out of the community and transferred it to academia (Mathers & Witter-Merithew, 2014; Shaw, 2014). Elliot and Hall (2014) described this change as bypassing the Deaf community and eliminating the guidance that had been provided by the stakeholders most impacted by interpreter skills and attitudes.

Since this change, sign language interpreting students often have no connection to the Deaf community and have limited opportunities to interact with members of the community. Bypassing the Deaf community in this way constituted a significant negative impact for Deaf users of interpreting services. Students were no longer learning sign language and Deaf culture in the community which would be a natural setting and members of the Deaf community had limited input into the training of interpreters. Another important implication of this shift was that students could graduate with a degree or certificate in interpreting with minimal understanding of the Deaf experience and without proper respect for the culture and community they would be serving (Shaw, 2014).

Cokely and Witter-Merithew (2015) described the inception of interpreter education in the 1970s as a time when Deaf people were very involved in the selection of

future interpreters. The community invited those who they felt had potential to become involved in interpreting. The community guided those young interpreters regarding which interpreting situations they could handle and which they should steer away from until they had more experience (Cokely & Witter-Merithew, 2015). As interpreter education shifted to the academic world, that guidance was lost. New interpreters are involved in many areas of a Deaf person's life; work, education, healthcare, and community service settings to name a few. These novice interpreters must be able to handle situations where they have very limited information (Taylor, M, 2013). When members of the Deaf community were involved in guiding new interpreters there was a sense of trust between client and interpreter that has been diminished because of the shift to training interpreting students in academic settings. (Shaw, 2014).

In March 1964 a group of interpreters met at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana to discuss the growing need for interpreters (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). From that meeting emerged the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) which was incorporated in 1972. RID began testing and issuing certifications in 1972 (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). During this time summer intensive training sessions began and eventually developed into 2-year community college programs (Furmanek, 2014; Ball, 2013). At the time of this study, there are over one hundred interpreter education programs nationwide (Ball, 2013). Most interpreter education programs continue to be associate's degree and certificate programs, although more baccalaureate programs are also being developed (Ball, 2013; Hunt & Nicodemus, 2014).

Cokely and Witter-Merithew (2015) stated that the first ASL interpreters were strongly connected to the Deaf community, whereas today many students choose interpreting as a major with no previous ties to the Deaf community. There was no way to predict the explosive demand for sign language interpreters and the increase in legislation related to interpreting. This increased demand led to the development of more academic programs, opening the profession to those outside of the Deaf community (Ball, 2013). Cokely and Witter-Merithew (2015) stated that many interpreters, including themselves, were asked to become the first interpreter educators. There was no training or model; they simply attempted to teach what they knew and what they had learned from the Deaf community.

One of the impacts of the shift from community training to academic training is the competency of graduates from interpreting programs. Those who were raised up in the Deaf community and transitioned into interpreting had more native-like competencies that cannot be taught in a classroom (Cokely & Witter-Merithew, 2015). In 2005, Witter-Merithew and Johnson published a report on the Entry-to-Practice Competencies Project, which included information from approximately 400 stakeholders and developed a list of 34 competencies that these stakeholders believed to be essential (Winston, 2013; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005).

Little has changed since the Entry-to-Practice Competencies Project was completed in 2005 (Taylor, M., 2013). Graduates from interpreting programs still do not demonstrate the level of competency recommended (Mathers & Witter-Merithew, 2014). Identifying essential competencies was not enough; interpreter educators need to discuss

how to help students develop those competencies within an academic setting (Angelelli, 2013; Godfrey, 2011; Winston, 2013).

### **The Gap**

Angelelli (2013) suggested that the ASL interpreting profession can no longer use the excuse of newness to justify accepting the status quo. In spite of the increase in ASL interpreter training programs, Bentley-Sassaman, Houser, and Morrison (2014) reported that the majority of graduates from those programs were unable to pass the required minimum state level credentials to interpret in public schools. James and Gabriel (2012) identified a common perception that interpreting programs do not prepare graduates for work in the profession. In alignment with Bentley-Sassaman et al., James and Gabriel (2012) noted that recent graduates performed poorly on standardized evaluations and needed several years of postcollege experience in order to become nationally certified.

Graduates of interpreting programs being unable to pass state or national certification evaluations has been described as a readiness-to-credential gap (Godfrey, 2011). Previously researchers described the readiness-to-work gap as students graduating without necessary skills to enter the workforce. Godfrey (2011) recognized that most graduates of interpreting programs had basic skills and were able to do entry-level interpreting assignments. The real issue was that they were not able to qualify for the credentials required by their state government.

This gap between the classroom and effective professional work was the impetus for the Entry-to-Practice Competencies Project conducted by Witter-Merithew and Johnson (Schafer, 2011; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). Data collected from



discussions with stakeholders resulted in the development of a list of essential competencies. Schafer (2011) recognized there is agreement that the competencies were desirable, however, recent graduates from interpreting programs have not mastered them. Schafer suggested looking to adult learning theory which stresses the need for authentic learning opportunities and extensive practice. Mathers and Witter-Merithew (2014) reported that this gap in readiness has been documented for over a decade and there has only been a minimal reduction in the readiness-to-credential gap.

Another way to view the gap is through the eyes of the graduates themselves. Meadows (2013) documented the real-world shock students experienced when they entered the interpreting profession. Only 70% of students reported having some kind of fieldwork and 15% reported that the only interpreting practice they had done was in the classroom. Respondents in the Meadows study stated that real life experiences were considerably different than what they learned from their professors (Meadows, 2013). Humphrey (2015) reported similar findings from a survey of students who graduated from a 2-year postsecondary interpreting program. The survey revealed that only 50% of the students had any experience interpreting in real world settings; with the other 50% only practicing using audio or video tapes. Mikkelson (2013) also reported a disconnect between what is taught in the classroom and the actual requirements of professional assignments. Students who did not have an effective internship felt unprepared for their first professional assignments (Meadows, 2013).

### **Internships in Interpreter Education Programs**

One area of agreement among interpreter educators is the need for interaction with the Deaf community. Interpreting programs located in close proximity to vibrant Deaf communities provide opportunities for students to learn ASL and Deaf culture in a natural setting (Godfrey, 2011). Jankowski (2014) noted that interpreting students at the time of this study have not had the same level of immersion into the language and culture as interpreters who were trained by the Deaf community members. Early networking with the Deaf community as well as professional interpreters enhances learning and allows students to develop these skills as well as connections for their future careers (Rowley & Kovacs-Houlihan, 2014; Webb, 2012).

In addition to being involved with the Deaf community, interaction with professional interpreters helps students develop their skills and confidence (Humphrey, 2015). M. Taylor (2013) encouraged interpreter educators to stop thinking of their students merely as students but to have a vision of the professionals they are training to be. Taylor also explained that for students to become those professionals, they must first identify with that professional world which will help them to apply what they learn in class to the work they will do during an internship and as professionals. Interacting with working interpreters, observing them on the job, and then participating in an internship will motivate students towards success (Taylor, M., 2013).

Bentley-Sassaman (2009) described the capstone of many interpreter education programs as a practicum where students can apply the knowledge they learned in the classroom under the supervision of a mentor. Schafer (2013) compared an interpreting

internship to the player/coach relationship in professional sports, recognizing that students may not have the metacognitive ability to evaluate their own work. A mentor is able to provide critical feedback and model personal analysis: Block (2013) suggested that interpreter educators follow the lead of many other professions in using mentors. Block noted that students of medicine, law, and even skilled crafts learn from the best in their fields, and the interpreting profession should do the same. Humphrey (2015) developed a four-stage plan for students to observe interpreters, engage in real-world interpreting scenarios in class, do supervised fieldwork, and finally participate in an internship.

### **Internships in Related Occupations**

Interpreting is not the only profession that requires some kind of internship or fieldwork before students can transition from the classroom into the professional world. Musicians, sports professionals, and many others must participate in thousands of hours of deliberate practice to achieve a competitive level of performance (Schafer, 2011). Schafer (2011) suggested that interpreter educators must work with students in the same kind of mentoring or coaching relationship.

Education is a field that mirrors interpreter education in the importance of an internship semester (Wyss, Siebert, & Dowling, 2012). Green and Ballard (2011) discussed the use of experiential learning in teacher preparation programs and the value of connecting experience with learning. Student teaching or field experience is generally completed in the senior year of college over the span of one semester. Students are referred to as preservice teachers and begin by observing in the classroom and then

teaching under the supervision of the regular classroom teacher. For the last few weeks of the semester, the preservice teacher takes full responsibility for the class (Green & Ballard, 2011). Wyss et al. (2012) found that students' comfort level with teaching increased over the course of their preservice teaching semester, which helped them to prepare for professional employment.

Health care is another profession that uses fieldwork or internships to prepare students for professional work. Internships allow healthcare students to further develop competencies learned in the classroom and gain experience in various environments. The interns also begin to develop a professional network. An additional benefit of a healthcare internship is the opportunity to build their confidence in preparation for work after graduation (Hernandez, Bejarano, Reyes, Chavez, & Mata 2014).

Peterson, Wardwell, Will, and Campana (2014) noted the apprehension psychology students felt before their internship. Students wrote about concerns with time management, working with diverse populations, and being able to adequately meet the expectations of their program. Upon completing the internship, students reported gaining knowledge and skills in psychology as well as many other areas. Communication skills were noted as a major benefit from internship. The interns reported that they learned to listen, give clear directions, and to rephrase information when clarification was needed (Peterson et al., 2014). Other areas of gain included interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and working as a member of a team. Students identified the most important benefit from their internships as an increase in confidence in their own ability to work in their chosen profession (Peterson et al., 2014).

Magaletta, Patry, and Nocross (2012) described internship as a supply pipeline for students entering professional employment. Their study documented that more than half of the psychology students who interned in correctional facilities were hired by correctional facilities upon graduation. Overall, employers are looking for applicants with experience; both students and employers see internship as the needed transition between classroom and their first professional position.

Internships are used in many professions as a bridge that allows students to successfully move from classroom to professional employment. The findings of one study suggested that interpreter educators should consider internships as a necessary component of training. Well-trained graduates with internship experience become the next generation of qualified interpreters (Magaletta et al., 2012, p. 1413).

### **Implications**

Researchers agree about the need for a supervised internship or practicum, but many interpreting programs do not offer any type of practicum experience (Godfrey, 2011; Humphrey, 2015; Meadows, 2013; Wang, 2015). ABC College has a 12-week internship, but it had not been evaluated since it began in 2006. The findings from this program evaluation are intended to provide direction for improving both the local interpreter education program and interpreter programs nationwide. The program director and faculty of the college would initially benefit from this study. Upon implementing recommended changes, the benefits would be passed on to future students and aid in recruitment and efforts to expand the program.

Data from this study would not only impact the internship program but may benefit other areas of the interpreting program by providing guidance in increasing local field experiences prior to the internship semester (Green & Ballard, 2011; Mo & Hale, 2014). Additionally, faculty in all phases of the interpreter training program would be able to use the data to design activities and projects that would better prepare future students for internship.

Throughout the literature, there is evidence that many graduates from interpreting programs do not demonstrate the essential competencies to be successful practitioners (Mathers & Witter-Merithew, 2014; Schafer, 2011; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). There is also a demonstrated need for interpreting students to have more hands-on experience, specifically supervised practicums or internships (Humphrey, 2015; Mo & Hale, 2014). Looking to other professions we see the benefit of internships in preparing students for their chosen profession (Green & Ballard, 2011; Hernandez, Bejarano, Reyes, Chavez, & Mata, 2014; Magaletta, Patry, & Nocross, 2012). Improving this college internship program may also decrease the readiness-to-credential gap, allowing more graduates to pass state and national credentialing assessments (Godfrey, 2011).

Upon completion of this program evaluation, the results will be reported to the research site using the program evaluation report. The full study will also be made available to the college administration. Other possible outcomes of the study would be the creation of a training module for mentors, a revision of the internship manuals, and the development of a handbook for the interpreting program.

## Summary

In section one, the local problem was identified and an explanation was given regarding how the local problem fits into a broader problem within the field of sign language interpreter education. Important terms were defined and the guiding questions of this program evaluation were given. A literature review was included which discussed the areas of program evaluation models, theoretical framework, the history of interpreter education, the readiness-to-credential gap, internships in interpreter education programs, and internships in related occupations.

The implications of students graduating without the essential competencies needed to obtain state or national credentials were discussed. Negative implications include the impact on the Deaf community being served. Increasing hands-on interpreting practice and specifically a supervised internship were identified as ways to reduce the readiness-to-credential gap.

Implications for social change include improving the internship experience of future students as well as impacting the entire interpreting program at this college. Another positive impact would be sharing the information to a broader audience including other interpreter education programs. The most important social change would be to improve the interpreting services provided for the Deaf community.

The research methodology that was used in this study is explained in section two. This includes the design of the study, who participated, and why that particular sample was chosen. Methods used to assure the ethical protection of the participants' privacy and

the role of the researcher are also explained. Additionally, the data collection, analysis, storage, and reporting methods are outlined.



## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an internship program within an ASL Interpreting major at a small private college. A qualitative methodology was used to collect data from stakeholders and to review documents. Most qualitative research includes the use of interviews to understand the views of stakeholders regarding a specific issue, as recommended by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010). This section will include the research design, rationale for using the design, participant information, and data collection and analysis methods.

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

I used a qualitative research design to conduct an expertise-oriented program evaluation. A program evaluation is used to help an organization make decisions related to the success of a program or the need for changes (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2010; Spaulding, 2014), which were end-goals of this study. Expertise-oriented approaches can be used for a formative evaluation or a summative evaluation; in this study, a formative/implementation approach was used to document what is actually happening within the program while changes can still be made, in alignment with Wall (n.d.). Data were collected through interviews and review of documents including policy materials, contracts (between the college, intern site, and student), and the semester evaluations done by internship site directors and students. The program policies, goals and expectations, semester evaluations, semester calendar, and assignment schedule were

all included in the internship manuals given to the students and the internship site directors, which I examined.

Data were also solicited through one-on-one interviews with graduates who completed the internship program in 2013, 2014 and 2015, as well as the directors of the internship sites used between 2013 and 2015. Additional interviews were conducted with the academic dean who helped to establish the interpreting program in 2002 and the professor who supervised the first internship semester in 2006. Interviews allowed participants to share their ideas and reveal perceptions that may not be available in any other way, as recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012).

### **Research Questions**

The questions guiding this research were:

1. What do the stakeholders describe as the strengths and weaknesses of the internship program?
2. In what ways do the policies, objectives, and assignments of the internship program, as presented in the Internship Manual, prepare students to work as an intern?
3. In what ways does the internship program prepare students for employment as professional sign language interpreters?

A semistructured interview protocol was conducted using open-ended questions that enabled participants to share their perspective on the internship program. The semistructured questioning format allowed me to explore beyond the scope of the planned questions, in alignment with Lodico et al. (2010).

### **Rationale for Research Design**

I chose a qualitative research design because it allows participants to express their views without limitation (Creswell, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained that qualitative research is done with a small group of people with experience about the issue being studied, focusing on depth of study rather than breadth. Either qualitative or quantitative research methods may be used for a program evaluation (Lodico et al., 2010); in this study, however, a quantitative or mixed-methods approach would not have provided an in-depth opportunity to examine the feelings and perceptions of the participants (Lodico et al., 2010), which made these methods undesirable. The participants' experiences and impressions provided the insight needed to evaluate the impact of the internship program on graduates' preparation for employment after graduation.

An expertise-oriented program evaluation approach was chosen to evaluate the level of success and impact of the ASL internship as well as suggest areas for change or improvement, in alignment with Lodico et al. (2010) and Wall (n.d.). An expertise-oriented approach is commonly used when the evaluator is an expert in the field (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Spaulding, 2014); the evaluator assesses the quality of the program and makes recommendations. This information may then be used in ongoing decision-making.

Other types of qualitative research were considered however research approaches such as phenomenological or grounded theory research would not answer the research questions of this study, in alignment with Creswell (2013) and Lodico et al. (2010).

Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted that a program evaluation using interviews with people who are knowledgeable about the issue being studied can provide in-depth information from their point of view.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study included 13 of the 15 students who participated in the ASL interpreting internship between the years of 2013 and 2015. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling which is commonly used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). Lodico et al. (2010) noted that purposeful sampling involves choosing participants who have specific knowledge and from whom the researcher is able to learn about the central issue of the study. An email request for an interview was sent to all 15 graduates and 13 chose to participate. Between 2013 and 2015 the graduating classes averaged four to six students. Within this sample of 13 students, four graduated in 2013, five graduated in 2014, and four graduated in 2015. This provided a diverse sample of those who have graduated only a year ago and those who have been working in the profession for the past two to three years.

Additional participants were eight of the 12 intern site directors or coordinators who worked with those 13 students during the same time period. Requests for an interview were extended to all 12 directors during the years of 2013-2015 with eight agreeing to participate in the study. The intern site directors who participated also represented the three years included in this study. One worked with interns during 2013, four worked with 2014 interns, and two worked with interns in 2015. Additionally one of the site directors worked with a student in both 2013 and 2015. Other interview

participants included the former academic dean who initially helped to develop the program in 2002, and the supervisor of the first internship semester in 2006.

This study was conducted at the college where I teach. After obtaining approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB #02-15-16-0394513, expiration February 2017), I submitted my proposal to the college IRB and obtained permission to conduct the program evaluation. An initial email was sent to the 15 graduates, 12 internship site directors; former program director, former academic dean, and the first internship supervisor asking for an interview. I advised those contacted that participation is voluntary and explained that all personal information will be secure throughout the study and names will be eliminated using a coding system for identification.

Participants were given an informed consent form and asked for written permission to audio record their interview. I encouraged participants to ask any questions prior to signing the consent form and assured them that they could ask questions at any time during the study and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Included in the informed consent form was my contact information as well as the contact information for my advisor and Walden University's research participation advocate. The Walden University IRB approval number 02-15-16-0394513 was included. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the internship site directors, graduates, and former leadership.

### **Interview Procedures**

The interviews were conducted via telephone or Skype because participants were working throughout the United States. One former administrator and one former intern who live locally were interviewed in a face-to-face meeting. Confidentiality was protected by conducting telephone, Skype and face-to-face interviews in my office with no one else present. Participants were advised of confidentiality via the initial email and the consent form.

I had a prior professional relationship with all of the graduates, directors, and former leadership personnel interviewed in this study. I do not hold any supervisory role over any of those who will be interviewed; however, I had a professional connection with them as an interpreter and educator in the field. The initial email and subsequent discussion to answer questions and set up interviews provided an opportunity to reestablish those relationships. In addition, several icebreaker questions began each interview. These questions helped to establish the researcher and participant relationship, as well as gather basic background information.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

An important part of research is protecting the participants and ensuring that the research process does not cause any harm to the participants (Creswell, 2012; Spaulding, 2014). I participated in training through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) via a web-based course called *Protecting Human Research Participants*. This study did not pose any risk to the participants' wellbeing and no identifiable information was included in the written report. Participants were identified by letter and number combinations to

signify if they were administrators, site directors, or interns (e.g. Administrator 1 [A1], Director 2 [D2], Intern 3 [I3]) in order to protect their identity. All data and recordings were made secure in a password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed 5 years after the publication of this study.

### **Data Collection**

For this study, data collection included an examination of documents as well as one-to-one interviews that allowed me as the researcher to understand the participants' experiences, as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012). A semistructured interview approach was used so that participants were encouraged to elaborate on their responses. The open-ended nature of interview questions allowed participants the opportunity to share their experiences and what they perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of the internship program.

### **Document Analysis**

The documents that were reviewed consisted of policies, contracts (between the college, intern site, and student), and the semester evaluations done by internship site directors and students. Prior to the internship semester, the students and internship site directors are given internship manuals which include the program policies, goals and expectations, semester evaluations, semester calendar, and assignment schedule. The review of the contracts, policies, and semester evaluations in the internship manuals allowed me to relate comments from interviews to the application process and preparation students and agency directors receive prior to the internship semester, as well

as the evaluation form used by directors and students to comment on the internship semester.

Issues or concerns raised during the interviews were considered while reviewing the documents. Notes were taken and put into a chart in order to compare data from the documents to concerns expressed by the participants relating to the documents. Comparing information from the interviews with the current documents led to recommendations for changes to the documents.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with the former academic dean who helped to establish the internship program as well as a former professor who supervised the first internship semester. In addition 13 graduates who completed the internship program in 2013, 2014, and 2015 were interviewed. These graduates represent different levels of postgraduate experience in the field of sign language interpreting. Eight agency site directors who worked with the graduates during the years of 2013, 2014, and 2015 were also interviewed.

I conducted the interviews, which lasted an average of 30-60 minutes, using main questions and probes. Main questions assured that all key areas of the study were discussed. Probes were used to encourage the participant to elaborate on their comments and to provide examples, as recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012). Separate interview protocols were used for the administrators, site directors, and interns. Each participant in the group was asked the same questions following the appropriate protocol.



The interview recordings were then transcribed and my notes and impressions from their interview were emailed to each participant. The participants had an opportunity to review these notes and make any additions or clarifications. This member checking made sure that their ideas, concerns, and experiences were accurately represented.

### **Storing and Handling Data**

Interviews were conducted via telephone or Skype for those participants who live in other parts of the country. All 23 participants gave permission to have their interview audio recorded; I also took notes during all interviews. Data were stored in a locked file and on a password-protected computer at my home; no one else will have access to this data. Participants' names were not used in transcripts or coding, an identification number was assigned to each participant with the master list stored separately. Data will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

### **Role of the Researcher**

This study was an expertise-oriented approach, a method that is commonly used for program evaluations (Lodico et al., 2010). With this method, the evaluator is an expert in the field being evaluated and is able to assess the program and make recommendations (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Spaulding, 2014). I have extensive experience in the field of interpreting and interpreter education, I know the program being evaluated due to my position. My professional experience related to this research includes 29 years of experience as a sign language interpreter. I hold two national certifications from the RID I have been an evaluator for two different interpreting tests. I have also taught ASL

and interpreting for over 20 years at the college level and have taught many workshops for interpreters throughout the country. In my experience teaching, evaluating, and mentoring interpreters I have developed course syllabi and curriculum, classroom and workshop activities, and interpreting assessments.

There are pros and cons to using an internal evaluator in this way (Lodico et al., 2010). For example, it could be argued that an internal evaluator would not be objective and would bring her own biases to the assessment, which could call into question the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2012; Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). I believe that my interest in seeing this program improve and expand, the trust that stakeholders have in me, and my understanding of the program allowed me to function successfully as an internal evaluator.

Transparency was also important in this process to assure that biases were addressed and that all parties understood my role as the researcher. Transparency was achieved through disclosure of my role and the scope of the study in the Informed Consent forms and by recording the interviews and asking the participants to check my initial impressions to assure their intentions are being represented.

### **Potential Bias**

I was both the researcher and the director of the ASL Interpreting program that was evaluated. All of the graduates who participated in the study were my students, which is why only past students were interviewed for the study. Interviewing students during their internship semester would have presented two problems. First, the students would have still been under my supervision and might alter their responses to gain my

approval. In addition, those students would not have had the experience of finishing the internship program and then obtaining professional employment which would have prevented them from providing some of the desired information relevant to the research questions.

The internship site directors who were interviewed all worked through interpreting agencies or schools outside of the location of the college. None of the directors were known to me in any other capacity. The former professor and academic dean who helped to establish the internship program were, at the time of the study, are no longer employed at ABC College. At the time of this study, I did not hold a supervisory position over any of the study participants.

### **Data Analysis**

I conducted the data analysis after each interview and after reviewing the internship manual, including the policies, contracts, and semester evaluations. The timing of this analysis aligned with Merriam's (2009) suggestion to analyze each piece of data soon after it is collected. I reviewed the purpose of the study and then read through each transcript making notes in the margins. Reflections, themes, ideas, or questions were documented in a separate memo. This process not only helps organize the researcher's thoughts about the current data but may provide ideas for what to look for or ask in subsequent interviews or in reviewing documents (Merriam, 2009).

Bowen (2009) described content analysis of documents as the process of skimming through the document to identify categories that relate to the research questions. Using thematic analysis allows the researcher to look for patterns within data.

Codes used for interview transcripts can then be applied when analyzing documents having similar themes (Bowen, 2009). This study included both content and thematic analysis and incorporated the same codes and themes developed for the interview transcripts.

Creswell (2012) suggested a six-step process for interview data analysis:

1. Make a copy of all data and organize data by using a matrix;
2. Review each piece of data in a general way coding it with labels;
3. Develop themes from the codes;
4. Use diagrams, tables, or narratives to represent findings;
5. Compare findings with the literature and develop a list of limitations or recommendations for future studies;
6. Use member checking to validate findings.

After the interviews were completed, I reviewed the documents and looked for connections between the documents and interview responses to questions about the procedures and preparation for internship. The documents that were reviewed included the policies, contracts, and semester evaluation form. My goal was to see if there were areas that were not being covered in the documents and manual which would help the internship process be more successful.

### **Procedures for Data Analysis**

Coding involves identifying themes in each transcript or document and using a system such as color coding to make management of data easier (Creswell, 2012).

Merriam (2009) suggested that some type of coding is necessary to keep track of the

themes that emerge as well as your thoughts and reflections about the data. Coding their own data also helps the researcher develop insights and ideas about the data (Merriam, 2009). My goal was to develop an organized index of all data.

### **Interviews**

Rubin and Rubin (2012) advised that analysis of each interview may help the researcher improve the interview technique for future interviews. However, it is important that each participant be seen as an individual with their own experiences and views. The researcher must be careful not to let the views of previous interviews interfere with subsequent interviews. The interview should be considered a collaborative effort between the researcher and the individual participant.

For this study, I audio recorded all participant interviews and I then transcribed the recordings. I evaluated each interview for key words, phrases, and themes. Initial perceptions were recorded in the margins and a separate journal was used for the researcher's reflections, as suggested by Merriam (2009). I manually coded the data looking for similar words, phrases, or ideas. Color coding was used within the transcripts so that each emerging theme had a unique color. I then created a chart that displayed all of the emerging themes and key words or phrases from various participants.

### **Document Analysis**

After the interviews were completed I conducted document analysis, evaluating the documents for the same key words, phrases, and themes that had been identified from the participant interviews in alignment with Bowen (2009). I used the same color coding

system for these themes and reflections and recorded the findings in the document review instrument.

## **Findings**

### **Documents**

Research question two stated, “In what ways do the policies, objectives, and assignments of the internship program, as presented in the Internship Manual, prepare students to work as an intern?” The participants in this study were asked if the internship manual was helpful, if policies were clear, and were given an opportunity to make suggestions to improve the manual. Their responses were organized into six sections: requirements for interns, college goals and expectations, contracts, the end of semester evaluation, style and presentation of the manual, and recommendations.

**Requirements for interns.** The site directors and the former interns identified the need for more clarification regarding intern requirements. The internship manual contained a chart indicating the number of hours required in several areas such as interpreting, observation, and professional development. There was confusion about how to count the interpreting hours. Professional interpreters would still receive full payment for assignments that end early or are canceled at the last minute; however, the intern would have limited practice time in those situations. Since deliberate practice using experiential learning theory is the primary goal of the internship semester, clarification was needed regarding the specific requirements for interpreting hours during internship, in alignment with Kolb and Kolb (2012) and (Schafer, 2011).

**College goals and expectations.** Furmanek (2014) noted that there is a need for a stronger connection between academia and the world of the practitioner. The director of this internship program encountered a common problem which is to find appropriate internship placements for interpreting students which will provide them with the required extended interpreting practice, as suggested by Mo and Hale (2014). The relationship between the internship agencies and the college would be improved by providing clear goals and expectations for the participants.

The internship manual included the learning objectives for the internship semester however internship site directors noted that they need to know more about the program in order to decide if they would be willing to offer an internship position and work effectively with the interns. The internship application packet included a video of student work and a resume; however, the site directors identified several additional pieces of information that would inform their work with the individual student.

1. The name and brief description for the interpreting classes in the program.
2. The basic theories and topics the student has been exposed to.
3. Examples of interpreting opportunities the student has experienced.
4. A brief summary of the student's strengths and areas to improve from their professor's perspective.
5. A description of the types of assignments the program director expects the interns to experience during internship.

**Contracts.** The college has a Memo of Understanding (MOU) that was signed by the internship site director and the program director. Site directors noted that the

requirements for internship were defined in the internship manual, but were not included in the MOU. There was also a need for a specific MOU between the college and the students. Students were told of their responsibilities during an orientation meeting and the responsibilities and requirements are outlined in the internship manual, however, there was no actual contract signed by the student and the internship program director.

**End of semester evaluation.** A different end of semester evaluation was given to interns and site directors. Both evaluations included a Likert-type scale for several questions and an area for comments. One difference was that the intern evaluation had several open-ended questions to guide their comments; however, the site director evaluation only had a space for general comments. Site directors requested more opportunities to write about the experience of working with a student in their own words.

**Style and presentation.** The internship manual, including the policies and requirements, was laid out similar to a textbook. A great deal of information was included which can be cumbersome to work with. Site directors and interns acknowledged that the charts were far easier to read than the pages containing a large amount of text. The manual included a table of contents, but finding needed information quickly can be daunting.

### **Recommendations.**

The internship manual should be redesigned to make it both more appealing and more functional. Each section should have a one-page summary or chart giving the key information for the section. The pages that follow should still contain the more in-depth material that was previously included. Additional graphics and charts would enable the



users to quickly identify the information they needed. An additional section should be included that described the types of interpreting experiences recommended and specifically how to count interpreting hours.

To facilitate the connection between the college and the internship site agency more information should be shared about the individual applicant, in alignment with Furmanek (2014). The application packet should include a list of the courses the interns were required to take, with a one or two sentence course description. The manual should also include the major theories and interpreting models introduced to students during their courses. A student information sheet should be developed that would allow an interpreting professor to describe the strengths and needs of the student as well as the types of practice interpreting the student had done.

The college and internship site had an MOU, however, there was no signed MOU between the college and the student. The students signed an agreement to follow the rules of the college while on internship, but they did not sign an actual contract. An MOU should be developed for the students that includes the requirements and the consequences of not meeting those requirements. Additionally, the specific requirements should be added to the MOU between the college and the internship site which would create a more structured internship experience, in alignment with Godfrey (2011).

The current questions and scale items included on the end of semester evaluation were appropriate and do not need revision; however, additional questions for the site director evaluation should be considered. Adding open-ended questions would give the

directors the opportunity to elaborate on the experience of working with an intern and collaborating with the college, in alignment with Furmanek (2014).

### **Interviews**

Each of the interviews was transcribed manually and a draft transcript and notes of my initial impressions were sent to each participant so they could check it for accuracy and make any changes or additions to their responses. One participant added an example to clarify one answer; no other changes or additions were made. After the data were member checked, I manually coded the data looking for themes. I used four cycles of coding, each using a different coding method. Coding was further complicated because I interviewed three distinct groups of participants and each group had different interview questions. The first group included two former administrators who helped to establish the program; the second group included eight internship site directors, and the third group included 13 former interns. Each group of questions had to be coded separately through all four coding cycles.

Structural coding was used for the first cycle of coding. Saldana (2013) stated that structural coding is especially useful for studies that have multiple participants. This type of coding also helped to make initial categories. Table 1 shows an example of structural coding applied to the data from the interviews. The left column contains the excerpt, the middle column indicates which group of participants the excerpt is from, and the right column identifies the structural code.

Table 1

*Structural Coding Example*

Excerpt	Group	Code
They hear various perspectives from different interpreters, and then they can choose their own moving forward.	Site directors	Preparing interns for employment
I did assignments just like what I am doing now as a professional interpreter.	Former interns	Preparing interns for employment
Internship is similar to student teaching, it is important that the students get out in the field.	Administrators	Preparing interns for employment

In the second cycle of coding, I used descriptive coding to identify a word or phrase that summarized the topic of a passage. Saldana (2013) noted the difference between identifying the topic rather than summarizing the content of the passage. Table 2 shows examples of how descriptive coding was applied to the interview data.

Table 2

*Descriptive Coding Example*

Excerpt	Group	Code
There is a lot of training in our area. Many of our mentors have attended trainings.	Site directors	Mentor training
Mentors need to learn how to give feedback. One mentor was just mean and demeaning.	Former interns	Mentor training

I used In Vivo coding for the third cycle of coding. In Vivo coding is also called literal coding and refers to a word or phrase that used the language of the participant.

Saldana (2013) stated that using the language of the participant is a way to honor their voice. This coding method required me to identify the phrases that should be highlighted.

Table 3 includes examples of how In Vivo coding was applied to the interview data.

Table 3

*In Vivo Coding Example*

Excerpt	Group	Code
There was just never a question that there wouldn't be an internship.	Administrators	"Never a question" "need experience"
Where do students get experience? You want to be cautious about just dropping students into interpreting settings.	Administrators	"where?" "be cautious"
Say yes to everything, get experience in everything!	Former interns	"say yes"

All of the participants had strong feelings about the internship program. Saldana (2013) recognized that emotions are universal and they can give insight into the perspectives of participants. Emotions cannot be separated from actions; therefore the emotions felt by participants in the internship program impacted their success during internship. The emotions recalled by the participants or inferred by the researcher can be labeled and organized using emotion coding. Table 4 includes examples of the application of emotion coding to the interview data.

Table 4

*Emotion Coding Example*

Excerpt	Group	Code
I felt very prepared, but some things you can't prepare for.	Former interns	PREPARED
I worked with other people and I would say she was exceptionally wonderful as a person. Open to feedback, very flexible. The fact that she could just jump in, and she had enough confidence to try things.	Site directors	EXCEPTIONAL FLEXIBLE JUMPED IN

Meaningful patterns began to emerge as the coding was completed. Saldana (2013) noted that categories help the researcher organize data that have similar codes. Similar codes will appear repeatedly throughout the data and some codes will be embedded within other codes. For this study, data was grouped into categories by common characteristics. Once categories were identified I established rules to determine which data fit into which category. Table 5 defines each category and the rules used for inclusion.

Table 5

*Category Inclusion Rules*

Category	Rule
Preparation for internship	Participants' comments related to preparation and information received prior to internship.
Documents	Participants' comments regarding the contracts, policies, semester evaluation, and the usefulness of the internship manual.
Working with mentors	Participants' comments related to the skill, knowledge, and performance of the mentors as well as mentor training.
Internship prepares for employment	Participants' perspectives regarding how internship prepares interns for professional employment.
Suggestions for improving this program	Participants' perspectives about how to improve the existing internship program.

To move from categories to themes I reviewed the data to find similarities, differences, and repeated expressions. Saldana (2013) stated that themes may be thought of as discoveries made during the interpretation of data. Creswell (2012) suggested that a research study should include five to seven themes. Table 6 identifies the five themes I identified from the category data.

Table 6

*Themes*

Categories	Themes
Preparation for internship	Interns are well prepared and have enough information; however, they do not feel ready. Confidence is an issue.
Documents	There is a need for summary pages and graphics to make the documents easier to use. Site directors want more open-ended questions in the semester evaluation.
Working with mentors	Mentors need training in how to give constructive feedback. A simple form should be designed to give to the mentor for each assignment.
Internship prepares for employment	Interns interpreted assignments very similar to what they do now as professional interpreters. Real world experience.
Suggestions for improving this program	Site directors and interns suggestions related to preparing for internship and employment.

I interviewed participants in three different groups and each group had different interview protocols. The first group was former administrators who helped to establish the interpreting major and the internship program in 2002. Those participants were identified as A1 and A2. The second group was eight internship site directors who worked with interns during the years 2013 through 2015. They were identified using the symbols D1-D8. The third group included 13 former interns who participated in the internship semester during the years 2013 through 2015 and they were identified as I1-I13.

**Theme 1: Interns are well prepared and generally have adequate information to be successful during internship; however they lack confidence and therefore feel unprepared.**

The first theme relates to research question one: What do the stakeholders describe as the strengths and weaknesses of the internship program? Primarily it was the intern group who answered questions related to this theme; however, some comments from internship site directors also contributed to the theme. Question #6 from the intern protocol asked, “What training or preparation did you receive prior to internship?”

The educational theory of experiential learning is included as a part of all the classes taken before internship. The opportunity to practice interpreting on campus and in the community was identified as one of the strengths in preparing for internship. Bentley-Sassaman (2009) noted that observation of working interpreters and field experience opportunities greatly enhance students’ readiness for internship. Of the 13 former interns interviewed, 9 included their coursework from the ASL Interpreting major as a strength of the program in preparing them for their internship semester. In addition, I3 stated that “the practice interpreting on campus and outside of class really prepared me for internship.” Similarly, I10 identified “lots of practice hours” as contributing to the success of internship. I2 also felt that “talking to students who came back from internship” was extremely important in preparing the next group of students for internship.

I5 mentioned the value of the case studies and ethical situations from class discussions. “The case studies on ethical situations helped me for internship and still help





Although the internship site directors were not asked these questions, two questions from their protocol provided an interesting contrast. The interns did not feel that they were good enough to be successful during the internship program. They reported feeling inadequate, unprepared and freaked out. In contrast, most of the internship site directors were very impressed with how well prepared the interns were.

Site directors were asked about the types of interpreting assignments to which they assigned interns. Most internship sites had the interns observe for the first few days to become familiar with their mentor and the Deaf consumers. The interns were then allowed to help interpret assignments, starting off interpreting a small portion of the assignment. As their skills and confidence increased, they were allowed to take on more of the assignment until at the end of the semester they were interpreting full assignments.

The site directors described the kinds of assignments they felt confident assigning to the interns. D8 stated, “The intern was able to do routine medical appointments, college classes, some religious assignments.” D5 also felt comfortable allowing the intern to work in a variety of assignments as well as work with clients who were both Deaf and blind. “The intern did mostly medical appointments, some job interviews, staff meetings and other kinds of meetings, but mostly medical. She also had the opportunity to work with Deaf-Blind clients; we need more people knowing about tactile interpreting.”

Brown (2013) stated that employers are primarily interested in what applicants or interns can actually do. They want new employees to demonstrate skills such as being able to evaluate one’s own work, to have some level of work experience, and to work well with others. These skills make a graduate employable immediately after finishing

their training (Chan, 2012). Internship site directors expressed appreciation for the interns' readiness to work, their flexibility, and their commitment. Interns were well received by the communities where they worked and several were offered employment in those communities after graduation.

Question #9 from the site director interview protocol asked, "How would you describe the experience of working with a student from this program?" The responses also showed that the site directors were impressed with the interns' abilities.

D1 stated, "It was fabulous, it's hard to say how much was the intern and how much was the program and the prep work because I haven't had more than one student, but I think it came together very well."

D4 stated:

I've worked with other people; I would say she was exceptionally wonderful as a person and as an intern. She was very flexible and could just jump in. She had the confidence to try things and readily accepted feedback. She was well received here.

D8 stated, "She was delightful, we had a good time. The sad thing was that she had to leave the area, several of the people she worked with were disappointed." D6 also described a very positive internship experience, "It was a great experience! I appreciated the trust placed in me to guide her."

D5 compared students from this 4-year program with previous interns from a 2-year program.

It's a whole lot better than working with students from a 2-year program. I expect these students' language level to be a lot higher. It's more of a commitment, in this program, the students are taking it more seriously. I would choose a student from this program over the other college I've worked with.

Only one of the site directors felt that students were not ready to work with clients. When asked about the experience of working with students from this program D2 described it as "taxing, tough!" D2 further identified problems that were observed:

The insecurity makes it hard to get her to step out of her shell. The student would freeze up. The other student we had wasn't teachable; she felt she was the best in her class so she didn't need our help.

This same site director did praise the program, "the program is great and more well thought out than other programs." However, the expectations at this internship site are very high and interns were not allowed to interpret as much as in other locations.

**Theme 2: The documents used for internship (contracts, policies, semester evaluation in the internship manual) are helpful but difficult to use.**

Theme two related to research question two about how the policies, objectives, and assignments helped students be prepared for internship. This theme also showed a contrast between the data collected from interns and that collected from site directors. The interns used the internship manual primarily as a way to keep track of when assignments were due and to track how many required hours they had completed. Many of the interns could not recall much about the documents and felt they did not have a big impact on their internship experience.

Question #8 of the intern interview protocol asked, “In what ways was the internship manual helpful?” I2 stated, “I’m not the most organized person so it helped that it had hours, due dates all laid out.” I5 agreed, “It was a Godsend for students like me who have learning disabilities and need things laid out visually!” The organization of the manual was also helpful for I6 who stated, “The checklist was the most helpful part, it helped me keep track of due dates.”

When asked question #8b, “Were the assignments and due dates clearly defined?” I1 stated, “Oh yes, I believe some of them were highlighted!” I13 stated, “Yes, it broke down the due dates.” The due dates were outlined on a checklist which was identified as the most useful part of the manual for the interns.

Question 8c of the intern interview protocol asked, “In what ways was the semester evaluation helpful or not helpful?” The interns expressed appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their experience and give feedback. I7 stated, “The evaluations and journals helped me to remember everything I did.” I1 stated, “It made me look at who I was, did I improve? Did I take the chances I could have?” The opportunity to reflect on their experience supports experiential learning theory where knowledge is developed and reexamined through the personal experiences of the learner (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). I11 stated, “The evaluation was a way to give feedback while it was fresh in your mind.” I12 suggested, “Maybe we should fill out the evaluation again a few months later after we have been working for a while.”

The internship site directors had far more to say about the internship manual, contracts, policies, and semester evaluation. Question #5 from the internship site director protocol asked, “In what ways was the internship manual helpful?”

D1 stated, “I really did find it helpful. I have to applaud the level of effort that was put into it.” D3 stated, “I think it was helpful, it showed certain hours that were required. However, the memo of understanding only included the interpreting hours required. That created some misunderstanding.”

The site directors appreciated the information provided but had suggestions to improve the format. D2 stated, “The internship manual was helpful but it was static. Make it more interpreter friendly with graphics, bolded areas, arrows, and a summary page or chart for each section and the details behind it.” D8 described the entire manual as “too much!”

Basically, what I find as I age is ‘tell me in 25 words or less’! It was a lot of information to get across. Tables would be lovely, give me something quick and dirty and then if I want to read more I can.

Question 5c asked, “In what ways was the semester evaluation helpful or not helpful?” Again, site directors offered suggestions that would make the evaluation more meaningful for the interns and the college director. D2 stated, “It was redundant. I find it hard to evaluate using a 1-5 scale. An essay or short answers would be better.” D5 agreed and described how it feels to evaluate young interpreters:

Evaluations were tough, only because, they’re students. It’s hard as a mentor to judge them when I know they’re new. Even at the end, they’re very new to the

profession. I like to write feedback, of course, 20 essays on an evaluation would be hard to do, but I like to be able to explain myself.

The idea of an exit interview was suggested by more than one director as a data gathering tool both for the college and for the internship agency. Leurent, Reyburn, Mbakilwa, and Schellenberg (2016) noted that a well thought out exit interview allows an organization to gather data from participants which helps in the decision-making process. An exit interview also encourages meaningful future relationships between supervisors and, in this case, graduating students (Kulik, Rae, Sardeshmukh, & Perera, 2015).

The site directors felt an exit interview would be beneficial to the interns as a way to reflect on their experience and would also help the site directors themselves improve what they offered to future interns. D1 suggested:

I'm not sure it was helpful, it was a little repetitious. It might be more helpful to give a brief review of the previous evaluations done during the internship and then have a conversation. We need a way to document an exit interview, where we can talk about things like:

- What is your path forward?
- What do you want to do next?
- How are you going to move from this to professional employment?

**Theme 3: Mentors need guidance and training related to giving constructive feedback.**

Theme 3 related to the first research question, “What do the stakeholders describe as the strengths and weaknesses of the internship program?” Intern responses to questions

9b and 9c identified mentor training as a weakness and indicated a need for the college to give guidance and direction to mentors. Question #9b asked, “Can you suggest areas of training you feel mentors should be given before working with interns?” Question #9c asked, “What suggestions do you have to improve the experience of working with mentors?”

I1 described the frustration of working with one particular mentor:

Feedback! I had one mentor, they put me with her twice, both times she was just very mean, and she told me I should not interpret. She didn't understand why I would be in this major or why I came on practicum and she just tore me up. And I was trying to figure out is it really me? Or is this just her being who she is?

And when I had like 5 other people saying, ‘You did really good, here are some small changes’ or ‘this is a more laid back situation so you didn't have to do it that in order.’ She was like, ‘No, you were awful!’ and all this stuff. So I realized it's not me, it's just who she is. It's all about what you did wrong; never ‘you did this good’. So maybe teach them how to give feedback, constructive feedback.

The most common answer from the former interns was “teach mentors how to give feedback.” I3 clarified, “Teach them how to give constructive feedback.” I8 added, “Especially if they didn't go to an Interpreter Training Program, they may not know how to give feedback.” I4 also suggested, “It would be helpful if mentors would spend more time with us debriefing after our work.”



Johnson and Gandhi (2015) reported that there are very few programs available to train mentors. If any training is offered, it has historically been one short session before mentors are expected to work with interns or trainees (Lau, Ford, Van Lieshout, Saperson, McConnell, & McCabe, 2016). Goodman (2013) suggested that each participant in a mentoring relationship should do some type of personal assessment and self-reflection activity. The areas that should be examined by the participants are communication preferences, conflict resolution styles, goal setting. Understanding the communication preferences of each person in the mentor relationship will help to reduce conflicts during the mentoring process. Both long term and short term goals should be considered and goals should be specific. Goodman identified several areas that could be used to develop a training module for mentors. These areas are:

1. Establish the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and mentee.
2. Develop a plan for working together during interpreting assignments as well as how the mentee will work independently to improve skills, and how that practice will be reported to the mentor.
3. Open communication about any issues that arise.
4. Guidelines for effective feedback.

Another suggestion came from I10 who noted, “Staff interpreters had no experience with freelance interpreting. They couldn’t give me any information about the business end of being a self-employed interpreter.” I12 stated, “The site director gets the manual, the mentors don’t see all of that. Maybe it would help to give them a one-page

summary of expectations.” I11 suggested, “Give us a checklist of basic skills that we can give to each mentor to help them give feedback.”

Once again, the site directors had a different view about mentor training. Question #7 of the site director interview protocol asked, “Can you describe any training the mentors received prior to working with a student intern?” Question #7a asked, “In what ways might it have been helpful if the college provided training for mentors regarding our expectations?”

Site directors described training that was available to mentors. In most cases, it was not directly provided by the intern site agency but was general training in the area.

D1 stated:

In general, we have a lot of training in the area. Etna with Betty Colonomous which is self-reflection training, many interpreters have gone through that or Demand Control Schema training. I don’t sit down with them to train, but many of them have had some training. I also cultivate the relationships with interpreters. We have feedback conversations all of the time so they can use that with students.

D3 also described general training available in the area:

The community college has a workshop, it’s not formalized, we don’t do training ourselves but most of our mentors have attended that workshop. Still, it’s always a good idea to educate mentors. Once they’re in the field it’s hard to remember what it’s like to be a student.

D2 stated, “I don’t know that we need help with training. Providing more information for the mentors about what the students have been exposed to would be

helpful.” D7 described the variety of mentors who work with interns, “Some are just naturally good mentors. Some are super strict; we don’t want to scare the interns before they even interpret. I meet with the mentors regularly and try to help them grow too.”

D6 noted that many of the mentors the agency uses have already been mentors in other situations such as RID or a local university mentorship. D5 offered a suggestion:

It’s hard because of the distance, but if we had a brief description of what they studied, what experiences they’ve had with interpreting it would help. To have a better understanding of what the college has given them and what theories they’ve been exposed to. It’s always a good idea to try to educate the mentors. Once they’re in the field, it’s hard to remember what it was like to be a student.

This data showed that site directors generally felt the mentors had training opportunities and it was not necessary for the college to provide formal training. The interns, in contrast, felt the mentors needed specific training relating to appropriate ways to provide constructive feedback.

**Theme 4: Internship provides interns with real world experience that is similar to what they will do as professional interpreters.**

Theme 4 related to research question three, “In what ways does the internship program prepare students for employment as professional sign language interpreters?” Interns, administrators, and site directors all commented on the real world experiences that help the interns prepare for professional work. This theme reflects experiential learning theory that is used throughout the interpreting classes as well as the internship. Both formal education and learning from experience help the interns develop the skills

valued by employers and prepare them for professional employment (Brown, 2013; Chan, 2012; Elliot & Hall, 2014). The importance of experiential learning was reflected in theme four.

A1 reflected that internship may not have helped every student in the early days. “For every student? Maybe not. Maybe 90% would say the internship really helped them prepare. For the most part, I think it helped prepare them.” A2 remembered, “That semester when you’re out in the world, like student teaching, I can see the value of being out in the field. I think it was always a given, that it was important. It was never a question that the major would have an internship semester.”

Site directors also see the value of the internship semester. Many of the interns are offered employment with the same agency after completing their internship. The site directors are generally the people who hire new interpreters so they can see the results of the interns spending 12 weeks working with a mentor. The internship experience gives interns the confidence, self-evaluation skills, and hands-on experience employers are looking for (Chan, 2012).

D3 stated, “Students need to understand sometimes hours are hard because of clients not showing up, weather, cancellations – that’s real life. It also helps them to know what’s out there for them as professionals.” D8 commented on how internship expands the student’s awareness of the profession:

Internship helps them see the wide spectrum of environments. More than you can learn in school. They realize medical interpreting has all of the specialties,

illnesses, and pain management. They see that religious interpreting is different in each setting. So it widens their idea of the specialty areas.

D5 made a similar observation:

It gives them familiarity with the routine things like taking vitals. They figure out different ways to sign these things. They're also exposed to things the intern hasn't experienced yet and has little knowledge of. The internship definitely prepares them for real life work.

D7 stated, "It helps them realize what is really important. We rarely get complaints about someone's actual skills. More often complaints are about all the other soft skills." D6 recalled that the intern worked with several mentors. "Having so many mentors she learned from a variety of perspectives and then could choose her own way."

D1 stated that interns need to learn more than how to interpret:

This student made the transition pretty seamlessly, that's the point of internship – getting to know the landscape and what is available, developing relationships.

You really need to learn the business stuff, how to develop contacts. They focus on 'Did I sign that appropriately?' I focus more on how to get to the job on time, dressed right, prepared.

The former interns also had a great deal of insight looking back at their internship semester. Many gained confidence as well as skills, and others learned more about how to be independent. When asked question #5b "How did the types of assignments you did during internship help you, or not help you in employment?" most of the former interns

talked about internship being real world experience. I10 said, “It gave me an idea of what the profession really looks like. All the ethical stuff you deal with every day.”

I11 really enjoyed internship and described it as “a good toe in the water kind of situation.” I9 called internship “a chance to get my hands dirty.”

I1 talked about the many things learned during the internship semester that were a preparation for professional employment:

It taught me a lot about how to be accountable for myself; I learned how to do invoices, how to be organized with all of my assignments so I didn’t miss anything. I got to taste a lot of different varieties of appointments, there was medical, there was different meetings, college classes, just social events that I interpreted so I got to touch a wide variety of activities and assignments.

The types of assignments did help me because everything I did on practicum I’m doing now. It really mimicked the real life work I’d be getting as a new interpreter.

I7 is currently working for the same agency that provided internship supervision and also described the similarity between internship and employment:

My internship was pretty much the same as working for my agency. I mean obviously I had a professional with me but as far as the day to day routine it was very much like working for an agency. They sent me on a really broad range of assignments. Every day is completely different and you’re driving all over like a crazy person. Similar to what I do as an interpreter now.

I2 also learned about the scheduling issues interpreters face and was able to prepare for professional interpreting:

I got to see real life situations and different settings. I saw the scheduling, the craziness of the interpreters' schedules and learned how to be flexible. A lot of the assignments helped me because they were things that I do now, so having the mentor there with me really helped me prepare.

I13 explained her experience during and after internship and how it helped give a real picture of what professional interpreting would be like:

I had a lot of hands-on experience, actually working not just observing. I did a lot of college classes, doctor's appointments, hospital visits and even though my mentor was right there, I was doing the work. I think the variety of assignments helped a lot because that's what interpreting work is like.

I12 commented about figuring out the logistics of interpreting and how that helped to prepare for the work she is doing now in the same city:

It was a good taste of real life, a taste of the profession. My main mentor was not really nurturing so I had to do a lot on my own. It was hard but it also forced me to learn not only interpreting skills but also logistics and prepping.

I3 had a wide variety of experience and was able to take on more responsibility as the semester continued:

I got a lot of experience, my mentor took me everywhere. She wanted me to be involved as much as possible. I was given control, my mentor was there but I did the work. At the end of the semester, after my required hours were done, I was

able to do some jobs alone. I was able to be totally in control. It was nice to do that before going out for professional work. I also learned a lot of independence being so far from home. I had to figure out the bus system; my mentor appreciated my independence.

College students learn a great deal of information but sometimes do not have the confidence to put that knowledge into action. Personal experience builds self-efficacy, giving interns the opportunity to apply what they have learned to real-world situations. Dewey (as cited in Manolis et al., 2013) believed that experience was the most important aspect of learning and that one experience would lead to more experiences creating a chain of experiential learning. The internship semester provides that chain of experiences for the interns.

**Theme 5: Site directors' and interns' suggestions for improving the internship program.**

The final theme that emerged related to research question one, "What do the stakeholders describe as the strengths and weaknesses of the internship program?" The participants praised the existing program and also offered suggestions for further improvement. D5 stated, "Honestly I think what the college does is phenomenal! The interns coming from this college are far advanced from where I was when I graduated." D7 agreed stating:

Some programs really scare the students. They haven't done this before, it's all new. This college is really good about not doing that. The students are lucky to



have a director who is asking ‘What can we do to get better?’ Keep not scaring them!

Interns also recognized positive aspects of their training. I9 stated, “Overall I feel I got a good foundation.” I10 stated, “The program has a lot of really good stuff to get us ready.” Looking back, I12 stated, “I love what internship was, it was very beneficial. The ethical things we talked about, I’m so appreciative! Internship was a chance to dip your toe in.” I13 stated, “I was still nervous when I was first new, but after internship, I felt very ready to transition to employment.”

Comparisons to other programs were also made. Some graduates now work with interpreters who did not have a similar internship and they can appreciate the difference their own internship made in their training. I4 stated, “Now that I work with other interpreters, I think our program is great! Some interpreters working have no training or certification so I appreciate this college’s program.”

I1 currently works as both an interpreter and a part-time scheduler for an agency and noted the higher standards of this internship program:

I work with a lot of practicum students, I see them every day and I can tell that our program is a lot different than theirs. They do not have required hands-up hours; some who are getting ready to graduate have very few actual interpreting hours. I feel really nervous about that. So I feel we were very lucky to have our internship set up like it is.

I3 has had a similar experience working with interns from another program. She noted the benefit of doing her internship in another part of the country:

I see a lot of interns where I currently work. They all stay locally; you can see they're doing the same thing over and over. They have a certain number of weeks for medical and for educational, they don't get a real taste of interpreting. I can see how good our internship is compared to others. It's such a strong program, people are shocked.

Site directors and interns also had ideas about how students could be better prepared for the internship semester. Site directors were asked question #11 "Looking back, do you feel there are ways the internship could have been more beneficial in helping the student transition to professional employment?" and question #11a "What suggestions do you have to help internship program improve?"

D2 stated, "Let the students know they need to trust the mentors; the mentors are there for them. Make sure they communicate with the college director and their mentors during the semester." D2 also suggested something to work on before internship. "It might be helpful to practice different scenarios with the students. Give them situations they might see on internship and ask 'What would you do?'"

D3 suggested students have Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) training before internship so they are ready to work in hospitals and medical offices. D3 also stated "A lot of students don't understand the financial part or that they'll feel like they're living out of their car. They need to know about feeling safe in different environments and about self-care."

D7 suggested, "They need to look at what the job really entails – they are not comfortable but that doesn't mean they can't do it. Remind them to talk to their mentors

and the site director.” D6 proposed the college set up more contact with the site directors. “Would it be possible to do a monthly conference call with the agencies that have interns? Anyone who wants to log in can, we could learn from each other how to handle situations, how to motivate and encourage students.” D6 also asked if part of the research from this study could be shared with site directors.

D1 commented on the need for students to make better use of technology both before and after internship:

Students should develop an online electronic portfolio or a website. That would give us immediate access to videos of their work and information about them. It would help me know where to place them during internship but would also help them develop their business for after graduation. They need more information about business like the differences between staff, contractor, and subcontractor. They need to know more about contracts and taxes.

D4 raised the problem of convincing Deaf and hearing clients to allow interns to interpret for them. The medical profession routinely includes student nurses, interns and residents. Patients understand the need for hands-on training and accept these medical interns as a matter of course. “Our profession as a whole needs to educate our consumers, hearing and Deaf, so that having interns is automatic like in the medical field.”

Interns were also asked for feedback about the internship program. Question #10a of the intern protocol asked: “What suggestions do you have to help the internship program improve?” I2 stated, “Just my top thing was more hands up time so that I was working and a professional was there to critique me.” I4 agreed, “I wish I had more

variety.” I11 suggested the college internship director “send out a weekly question to help us remember our experiences. Not a requirement, but Senior Seminar class after internship was really valuable to share experiences with peers. So these questions would help us remember things we want to share.”

Several interns talked about needing more information about the business side of interpreting. I9 stated, “I wish we’d had more training in taxes.” Along the same lines, I10 stated, “I wish I took a business class.” I12 stated, “I wish I knew I needed three months of money before starting to work. You don’t get paid right away and you need money until you start getting paid. There is a lot of money we spend out of pocket.”

The interns also suggested things to share with future internship students. I8 suggested, “Try everything on internship. You have a safety net with a mentor.” I12 stated, “Attitude is everything! You can’t teach people how to want it, but if they really go for it, they’ll do better.” I9 said, “You can say no to a job, but you also need to try things and see what you can handle. Be open minded and see what you can do. If you decide you can’t do it, well now you know.”

I3 suggested telling students that there is more to internship than just the opportunity to practice interpreting:

Get experience and don’t be afraid. Balance homework, job opportunities and get out to explore the city. Internship isn’t just about interpreting, it’s part of being an adult, how to grocery shop, how to do things. If someone doesn’t feel independent, try it out and learn how to do things yourself.

## **Summary of Findings**

Findings from the document review supported data gathered during the interviews. Participants praised the work done to develop an internship manual with contracts, policies, and assignments laid out for both the site directors and the interns. D1 and D2 both mentioned how much more information they received from this college as compared to other college internship programs with which they have worked.

Participants also raised concerns about the internship manual and explained how misunderstandings or lack of information affected the internship semester. Interns and directors mentioned the confusion regarding how to count interpreting hours. It was evident that the interns were less concerned with the documents than the site directors. Responses from the interviews of former interns focused more on how the documents in the manual helped them keep track of their required hours and assignments.

Site directors were more concerned about contracts, requirements, and evaluations. Suggestions were made regarding the organization and usability of the manual. The directors also asked for additional information during the application process, specifically related to the courses and theories which the students had studied. They indicated a need for the internship goals and objectives to be less like a college syllabus and more related to how the internship director expected mentors to work with the students and what experiences should be provided for the interns.

The former interns indicated an area lacking in the internship manual and the internship semester. There is a need for more information, documentation, and training, designed for the mentors. One former intern pointed out the manual goes to the site

director, not the mentors. As a result, the mentors only have whatever information provided to them by the agency director.

Although site directors indicated many training opportunities for mentors, the experience of the interns suggested that many mentors have not had enough training related to giving constructive feedback and using the reflective techniques of experiential learning (Kolb, 2015). There are very few training opportunities that actually give people a chance to practice the skills needed to be an effective mentor (Goodman, 2013; Johnson & Ghandi, 2015; Lau et al., 2016). Interns suggested the college provide training that would help the mentors understand how to give constructive feedback. Mentors should also receive a simplified version of the expectations and requirements so they are aware of the agreement between the college and the site directors. Several interns also suggested that a feedback form that could be given to each mentor they work with would be helpful. Such a document would help guide the mentor in their observations and feedback.

One area that the former interns, administrators, and site directors agreed upon was how much the internship semester prepares students for employment. Interns have the opportunity to observe and have discussions with working interpreters. They also interpret assignments that are similar to what they will be asked to do as an entry level professional interpreter. This hands-on experience is the foundation of the internship program and was praised by all three groups of participants (Brown, 2013; Chan, 2012. Manolis et al., 2013).

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Qualitative trustworthiness involves checking for accuracy, while qualitative credibility looks for consistency. The researcher should check transcripts for obvious errors in transcription and making sure that coding procedures are consistent as one way to check for credibility (Creswell, 2012). In this study, member checking was used to maintain trustworthiness. Each participant was asked to review a draft of their transcript to assure that their statements were represented as they intended. Only one participant asked to add to one of her statements, including an example for clarification. Comparing, or triangulating, data from graduate interviews, internship site director interviews, leadership interviews, and review of documents and internship manuals provided me with a deeper and more comprehensive account (Lodico et al., 2010; "RJWF," 2008). Bowan (2013) also stated that triangulation of data allows a researcher to find corroboration and increase credibility.

Creswell (2012) suggested several strategies which were implemented in this study. As stated previously I used triangulation of information and member checking. In addition, I used peer debriefing. Peer debriefing involves having a peer review the study and ask questions in order to assure that the data support a logical development of themes, conclusions, and recommendations. I asked a peer with over 30 years of interpreting experience, who has also taught interpreting at the college level, and is a licensed attorney to review my interpretation of data. Participant identity was unknown to this peer who was required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Involving an interpretation from another person increases the credibility of findings (Creswell, 2012).

The peer reviewer confirmed that my conclusions and recommendations were supported by the interview data.

### **Assumptions**

It was assumed that participants answered honestly to the best of their ability. Although I have a relationship with those I interviewed, I do not assume they changed their responses to please me as I have no supervisory relationship with any of the participants. Their responses to the interview questions provided insights which will lead to improvement in the internship program and to provide a guideline for other interpreter training programs.

There were no discrepant responses from the interviews so there was no danger of discrepant responses changing conclusions. Personal bias and assumptions may make analysis difficult, therefore the use of peer debriefing helped to check for flaws in my logic or methods (Maxwell, 2013).

### **Limitations**

A potential limitation of this study was the small sample size. In the years 2013, 2014, and 2015 only 15 students participated in the internship program. While all 15 were contacted, two (13.3%) chose not to participate, of the 12 internship site directors that were contacted for interviews, four (25%) chose not to participate. Another possible weakness of the study may be the relationships developed between the researcher and the former interns, internship site directors, and former administrators. There was the possibility that participants would answer in a way to please the researcher. Using probes to encourage participants to explain their responses helped to reduce this issue. The



participants' dedication to the field of ASL interpreting seemed to result in them providing honest answers to help evaluate the internship program.

Data analysis focused on the three research questions in order to determine the effectiveness of the internship program. Document analysis and one-to-one interviews were used to collect data from 13 former interns and eight former internship site directors who participated in the internship program between the years of 2013 and 2015, as well as two former administrators who originally developed and supervised the program.

### **Project Deliverable**

Data from the interviews and document review were used to inform the program evaluation report. The five themes identified were:

1. Interns are well prepared and generally have adequate information to be successful during internship; however, they lack confidence and therefore feel unprepared.
2. The documents used for internship (contracts, policies, semester evaluation in the internship manual) are helpful but difficult to use.
3. Mentors need guidance and training related to giving constructive feedback.
4. Internship provides interns with real world experience that is similar to what they will do as professional interpreters.
5. Site directors and interns suggestions for improving the internship program.

Stakeholders can use the data in the evaluation report to make evidence-based decisions about the internship program. The evaluation report can also be used by other

college interpreting programs, as well as the Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT) and the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC).

### **Conclusion**

In Section 2 the research methodology, data collection, and data analysis for this study were described. The role of the researcher and methods for handling data were also discussed. A qualitative program evaluation was used to assess the effectiveness of an internship program within an ASL Interpreting major at ABC College. Data collection included document analysis of policies, contracts, and semester evaluations, along with other information contained in the internship manuals. Additional data were collected through one-to-one interviews with 13 former students and eight internship site directors who participated in the internship program between 2013 and 2015, as well as two former administrators who established and supervised the program.

The project for this study is a program evaluation report. The goals and rationale for the project are discussed in Section 3 and a review of relevant literature will be provided. The method of evaluating the project is discussed as well as local and far-reaching implications for social change.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the internship program within an ASL Interpreting major at a small private college in the United States. During my 29 years of experience as an interpreter and over 20 years as an interpreter trainer, I have seen many people with limited skills and knowledge working as interpreters. Over that same time period, laws and regulations have changed to require interpreter licensure in many states and to increase the requirements for national certification (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2013). However, as laws change, those already working in the profession are often “grandfathered in”, being allowed to continue working in spite of their inability to meet current requirements.

Research has identified gaps in training, however little has been done to change the curriculum and practices of college level interpreting programs (Taylor, M., 2013; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). Nationwide students are still graduating with a degree in ASL Interpreting, but without the skills to obtain state or national credentials (Godfrey, 2011). This study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the internship program within an ASL Interpreting degree program. In this section, I describe the project study, provide rationale for the design of the study, review current literature related to program evaluations and interpreter training, and explain the implications of the study.

### **Description and Goals**

An expertise oriented program evaluation was conducted to assess if the ASL Interpreting Internship Program at a small private United States college effectively prepares graduates for employment as professional sign language interpreters. The following areas were examined and the findings are explained in the program evaluation report (Appendix A):

1. The policies, contracts, requirements, and semester evaluation in the Internship Manual.
2. Participants' perceptions of student readiness for internship.
3. Participants' perceptions of the abilities and effectiveness of mentors working with the interns.
4. If participants believe the knowledge and skills gained during the internship semester prepare graduates for professional employment.
5. Participants' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the internship program.

### **Rationale**

The ASL internship program at the small, Christian college examined in this study had not been formally evaluated since the ASL Interpreting major was established in 2002. Since that time, anecdotal evidence indicated that the internship program is successful. This anecdotal evidence included mentor evaluations of individual interns, semester evaluation comments, employment rates, informal discussions with students, and an informal survey of graduates that was conducted in 2011.

Changes in the internship program were made in 2012 using this anecdotal data as well as new research in the field of interpreter education. However, without a formal evaluation the faculty and administration of the college cannot make evidence-based decisions. Program evaluations are conducted to assess the program's effectiveness and make recommendations for change (Spaulding, 2014). The recommendations from this program evaluation were intended to enable the college administration and faculty to justify changes to the program with the goal of improving outcomes for the students.

For this study, an expertise-oriented program evaluation was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the internship program in preparing graduates for professional employment. Other types of program evaluations were considered, such as objectives-oriented and decision-oriented approaches. Objectives-oriented program evaluation is often used in the education field, however when focusing only on the objectives of a program the researcher may miss other advantages and concerns of the program (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011; Lodico et al., 2010). Decision-oriented program evaluations such as the CIPP model could have been used but was not appropriate for the goals of this study. Decision-oriented program evaluations assume that the program will remain stable or the evaluator may need to reassess and make changes during the evaluation (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Every year the internship involves different students, mentors, and internship sites and therefore did not have the necessary stability for a decision-oriented program evaluation at the time of this study.

An expertise-oriented evaluation was conducted for this study with the researcher acting as an industry expert. I acted as both researcher and evaluator. My professional

experience enabled me to review the data with an understanding of the academic environment of interpreter education as well as the professional interpreting environment.

Historically interpreter education programs have focused on theory and ethics (Ruiz, 2013). Research has indicated that students need more hands-on interpreting experience and supervised internships (Godfrey, 2011; Humprey, 2015; Meadows, 2013; Wang, 2015). The college in this study has a 12-week internship program and needed a formal evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the program.

### **Review of the Literature**

A review of the literature was conducted using print and online sources from a variety of institutional libraries as well as databases including ERIC, ProQuest, Sage Premier, and Google Scholar. Searching for keywords helped to identify the theoretical frameworks used in this study. Keywords used for this review were: *program evaluation, experiential learning theory, American Sign Language interpreter training, interpreter education, and expertise learning theory.*

Interpreter training programs are taught in either a 2-year or 4-year degree program. The college program evaluated for this study was a 4-year Baccalaureate degree program at a small, faith-based private college. The students in this program spend the first two years learning ASL and the basics of American Deaf culture. Classroom learning is supplemented with involvement in the local Deaf community. Students then move into a series of courses that are designed to teach the process of interpreting and to prepare them for the internship semester and then professional employment. These courses are Introduction to Interpreting, Interpreting I, Interpreting II, Interpreting III,

Transliterating, and Topics in Interpreting which is a course that focused on the ethical aspects of the profession.

At the time of this study, experiential learning theory was used throughout the ASL Interpreting major including the 12-week internship. Students participated in a live or taped interpreting situation and then were asked to reflect on their work. The goal for this step of experiential learning theory was to help students develop self-assessment skills that would be needed in professional work (Brown, 2013). Students then discussed their work with peers and the professor who provided feedback.

Kolb and Kolb (2012) emphasized that the main focus of higher education should be to engage the students in the learning process which should include feedback about the effectiveness of their work. Using experiential learning theory, course work should be organized to include activities more than lectures (Gentry, Kaulbach, Smith, Simon, Feinstein, & Burns, 2015). The courses in this interpreting program provided opportunities for the students to be engaged in their own learning by practicing interpreting activities and reflecting on their work.

Throughout the ASL Interpreting, major students also have opportunities to practice interpreting in live settings on campus and in the community. Applying what they have learned to practice situations creates a more holistic learning environment (Zimbhoff, Taylor, & Houser, 2016). High-impact educational practices, combined with the opportunity to practice interpreting in various real-life settings help to prepare students for internship and employment, in alignment with M. Taylor (2013). These experiences reinforce the idea of experiential learning by starting with a concrete

experience followed by personal reflection and feedback from others (Heinrich & Rivera, 2016).

### **Experiential Learning Theory**

As suggested on the Learning Theories website (n.d.) skills and knowledge useful in a career are acquired through learning and practice. Burnard (2013b) stated that some of the most important things in human life are learned through experience rather than in formal educational settings. Burnard also noted that people learn through actions and through reflecting on how they act, through observing others and considering their actions. In this sense, experiential learning is vicarious learning. Observing someone succeed or struggle allows the learner to mimic or avoid the observed action (Bernard, 2013a)

All courses in the ASL Interpreting major at the study site include hands-on practice; the capstone experience of the major is the internship program. The internship program allows the interns to spend 12 weeks working in the community under the supervision of a mentor. Beard and Wilson (2013) described learning about something as informational but learning by doing as experiential, and the combination of both types of learning often delivers the best results. In this interpreting major that combination is achieved by both coursework and hands-on practice.

The adult learning framework used for this program evaluation was experiential learning theory. Throughout the ASL Interpreting major experiential learning theory is used to bring experience and reflection into the learning process. Experiential learning theory has been proven to enhance adult learning in many different fields (Gentry et al.,



2015). Experiential learning not only has a positive impact on learning but also on students' perceptions of the learning process (Burch et al., 2014). Experiential learning becomes the bridge between knowledge and practice (Beard & Wilson, 2013).

Experiential learning theory was popularized by the work of David Kolb (Ruiz, 2013). Kolb saw learning as a four stage process including Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC) and Active Experimentation (AE) (Chan, 2012; Kolb, 2015; Manolis, Burns, Assudani, & Chinta, 2013). The use of this theory is considered transformative for students (Green & Ballard, 2011). Students build skills and confidence enabling them to move from insecurity to a sense of self-assurance (Brown, 2013).

Kolb not only considered the experiences of the students but also examined the applications of experiential learning theory for teachers and administrators (Kolb, 2015). Learning and teaching styles must be matched to promote adult learning which includes optimizing the educator roles of facilitator, expert, evaluator, and coach (Kolb, Kolb, Passarelli, & Sharma, 2014; Kolb, 2015). Kolb noted that experiential learning is increasing in higher education and is being applied in many professional settings. Experiential learning has become accepted as a framework for learning-centered instruction, curriculum design, and life-long learning (Kolb, 2015).

Experiential learning is especially important during the required 12-week internship program. Interns observe working interpreters, participate in professional development activities such as workshops and seminars, perform a minimum of 120 hours of interpreting under supervision, and spend time analyzing their work with their

mentors. The real world interpreting practice during internship utilizes the four stages of experiential learning (Kolb, 2015). Students do an interpreting assignment, reflect on their own work, discuss the work with their mentor, and then include what they have learned in future assignments. Cannon and Feinstein (2014) stated that people usually think through their previous experiences when faced with a new situation and use that knowledge to construct a new solution. The ability to be flexible and apply previous experience to unfamiliar settings is extremely important for sign language interpreters. This deliberate practice and reflection helps the interns develop the skills employers will be looking for after graduation (Chan, 2012; Schafer, 2011).

### **Program Evaluations**

Program evaluations are routinely used in business and academic organizations and may be formal or informal. The goal of a program evaluation is to ascertain how well the provided services are meeting constituents' needs and to decide if a program should be continued, eliminated, or changed (Posavac, 2015). Another use for a program evaluation is to estimate unmet needs and to maintain quality within the program. In education, program evaluations can help stakeholders make decisions about activities, goals, and the use of resources (Lawton, Brandon, Cicchinelli, & Kekahio, 2014).

Program evaluation is an application of research used to see if the program is making a difference in the lives of the participants. Conducting a program evaluation allows a company to move from research towards evidence-based practice. This is accomplished by combining research evidence with industry expertise (Royse, Thyer, &

Padgett, 2015). This process allows evidence-based information to be used in a cycle of evaluation and improvement for the program (Chyung, 2015).

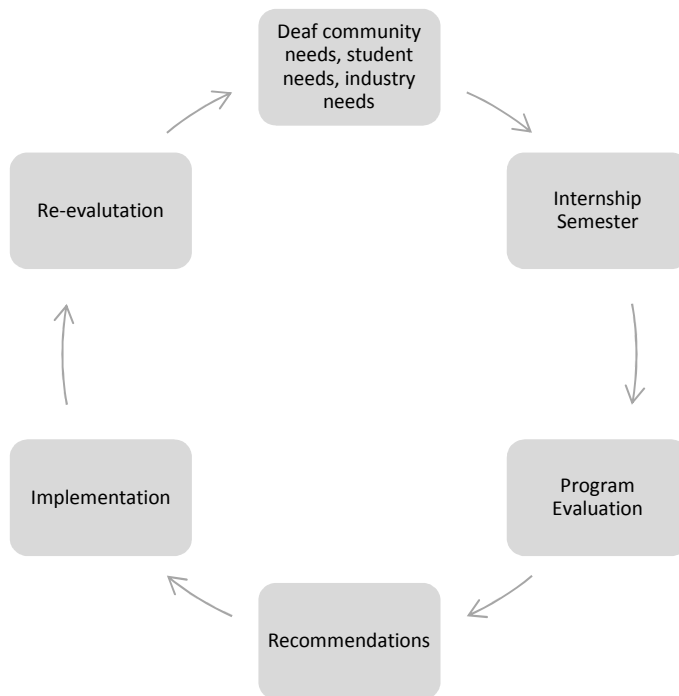
A program evaluation may use the expertise and insights of people who have invested time and effort into studying the area being evaluated, thus providing an in-depth evaluation that could not be accomplished through other evaluation methods (Madaus, Scriven, & Stufflebeam, 2012). Internal or external evaluators may be used when conducting a program evaluation; this study used an internal evaluator. The advantages of using an internal evaluator are that they will have better access to the program and the staff providing services, they will understand the structure of the program, and may avoid mistakes due to being unfamiliar with the organization. An internal evaluator may also be more invested in seeing the program improve. When using an internal evaluator, it is imperative that they have expertise in the field being studied and are able to report findings honestly without concern of reprisal so that the findings can be used for evidence-based decision making (Mertens, & Wilson, 2012; Unluer, 2012).

A program evaluation is part of the managerial process. Summative data would be gathered at the end of a program to measure outcomes and then make decisions regarding future changes. Formative data are collected and reported back to the faculty or staff while the program is being run. This allows the program to be adapted quickly. In this type of evaluation, it would be better to make changes quickly and ensure better outcomes for the participants, rather than wait until the end of the program (Brinkerhoff, Brethower, Nowakowski, & Hluchyj, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010 ).

The conclusion of a program evaluation is actually the beginning of the managerial process. The evaluation is only effective if the recommendations are used by the organization. An evaluation may seem threatening to some as a way to discontinue a program or reduce funding to the program (Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, 2015). It is important for the administration of the company to begin an ongoing process of evaluation, planning, implementation, and re-evaluation (Royse et al., 2015).

Figure 2 depicts how a program evaluation could be used in for ongoing decision making in an ASL interpreting internship program.

*Figure 2.* The Place of Evaluation in Ongoing Decision Making.



*Figure 2* A schematic showing a proposed evaluation and re-evaluation of an ASL interpreting internship program.

## **Implementation**

Conducting a program evaluation is the starting point for creating plans for improvement, coordinating with stakeholders to implement recommendations, and to continue the evaluation and adjustment process (Guerra-Lopez, 2008). This study provides the college with data and recommendations for the internship program. The next step is to move from research to practice.

The gap from research to practice has been a long-standing problem in the area of interpreter education. In 2005 Witter-Merithew and Johnson identified a list of critical interpreter competencies. Entry level interpreters were not demonstrating these competencies and were not able to obtain state or national credentials after graduation. Nearly a decade later, Mathers and Witter-Merithew (2014) reported there had been little reduction in the readiness-to-credential gap.

While researchers have identified the competencies needed to enter professional practice, academic programs have not made the necessary changes (Taylor, M., 2013). By agreeing to this program evaluation, the college used for this study has made a commitment to continuing to improve the internship program. It will be important for the college to implement the recommendations and to continue to evaluate the internship program regularly. The ongoing cycle of evaluation, planning, implementation, and re-evaluation will allow the college to make evidence-based decisions and incorporate stakeholder feedback into the program.

One of the major themes identified in the data were the problem of mentors not being skilled in how to give constructive feedback to the interns. To resolve this problem,

the college could develop an online training module that all mentors would be required to complete prior to working with an intern. Interns within this program travel to all parts of the United States for internship; therefore it would not be feasible to provide in-person training for mentors. Online training with a test at the end would help to alleviate the problem of untrained mentors.

### **Project Evaluation**

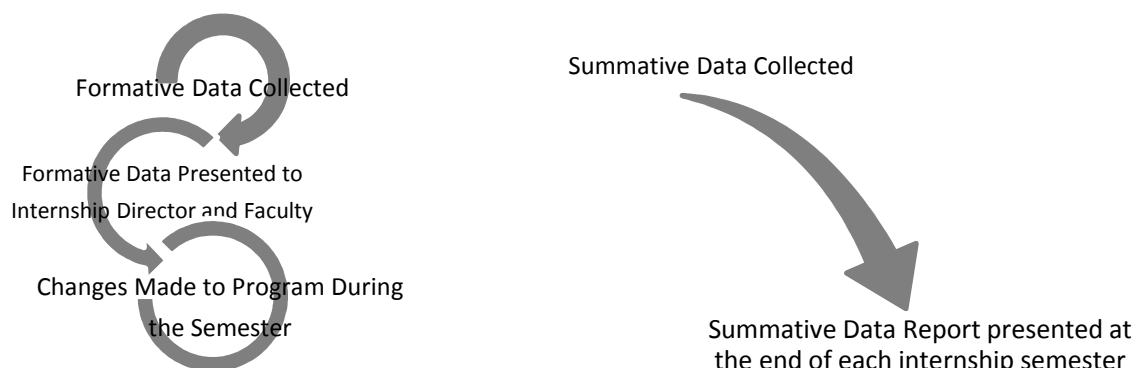
The next step is to move from research into practice and then reevaluate the program. After the college implements the recommendations from the program evaluation report there will be a need for ongoing evaluation. Some of the recommendations relate to the training students receive before the internship semester and other recommendations relate to the internship program directly. Therefore future evaluations will need to be both formative and summative.

Formative data may be used to make changes within the interpreting classes and the internship program while the program is in process. Lodico et al. (2006) suggested that formative data could be reported through informal means such as memos or phone calls. College faculty, student interns, and site directors would need to be in contact regularly to evaluate if the changes were effective. This type of formative evaluation would allow the internship director to make changes quickly throughout the program.

Summative evaluations should also be continued. Data is collected to measure program outcomes and decide what those outcomes reveal about the program (Lodico et al., 2006). The end of semester evaluation, as well as exit interviews with both interns and site directors, would enable the internship director to determine the effectiveness of

the program. A formal exit interview process should be established for interns and conducted during the Senior Seminar class which takes place in the last two weeks of the semester. An exit interview with site directors would also be important. At the time of this study, interns chose where they wanted to do their internship; therefore the same sites were not used every semester. Gathering data from interns and site directors would help the internship director and future interns make informed decisions about each location. Figure 3 shows how formative and summative data would be used in an ongoing evaluation process.

*Figure 3.* The Process of Formative and Summative Data in Ongoing Program Evaluation.



*Figure 3* A schematic showing the proposed formative and summative feedback loop used for the internship program.

## **Implications Including Social Change**

### **Local Community**

The ASL Interpreting profession is still relatively new and educators continue to look for ways to improve the outcomes of interpreting programs. Although research has identified the competencies needed by new interpreters, little has changed in the

interpreter education program curriculums (Mathers & Witter-Merithew, 2014). Many interpreting majors do not include a supervised internship program despite the need for supervised practice being well documented (Godfrey, 2011; Humphrey, 2015; Meadows, 2013; Wang, 2015).

I examined the internship program of one college through the lens of experiential learning theory. Results of the data analysis showed the internship program to be effective but also identified areas for improvement. The program evaluation report will enable the faculty and administration of this college to make evidence-based decisions regarding the current and future status of the internship program.

### **Far-Reaching**

In the 1970s, interpreter training moved from the community to academic settings first as short summer programs, then as 2-year degree programs, and finally to include some 4-year and even graduate programs (Mathers & Witter-Merithew, 2014; Shaw, 2014). In this process, the natural vetting of interpreter skills by the Deaf community was lost (Hunt & Nicodemus, 2014; Witter-Merithew, 2013). Prior to the start of academic programs, the training of interpreters fell to the Deaf community and other interpreters who acted as mentors. Interpreter education as an academic program may not include the involvement of the Deaf community and may not provide enough opportunity for real hands on practice (Elliott & Hall, 2014). As a result, students across the United States are graduating without adequate skills to obtain state or national credentials (Godfrey, 2011).

This gap in knowledge and skill reduces the number of qualified interpreters available to provide service to the Deaf community. This study provided data which



reinforces the need for hands-on, supervised deliberate practice for interpreting students. The study also showcased one internship program that has shown positive outcomes and identified the ways in which the program is effective. CIT and NCIEC can use this data to help other colleges improve their programs and to encourage further research.

### **Conclusion**

This study was an evaluation of the internship program within a Baccalaureate ASL interpreting major. This section described the study, provided rationale, reviewed relevant literature, and identified the implications of the study. The internship program was found to be effective while still needing improvement. The data from this study can be used to make evidence-based decisions for this program and to begin an ongoing evaluation process. This research study filled the gap in knowledge and may be used to encourage all academic interpreting majors to include an effective internship program. Further ongoing research is needed to document the improvement in the readiness-to-credential gap of students graduating with a degree in ASL interpreting (Godfrey, 2011).

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

In this section, I discuss the strengths and limitations of this program evaluation of an ASL Interpreting program at a college in the United States. I also examine the issues of scholarship and how I understand myself as a scholar, a practitioner, and as a program developer. I consider how this study may impact social change both locally and in a broader, more far-reaching way. Finally, I consider possible areas for future research. A program is meant to produce results and if it does not, it should be discontinued (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). The program evaluation report was designed to provide the college faculty and administration with the analysis of the current internship program. The program evaluation report will reveal the results of the study and provide recommendations for change. This study was designed to allow the institution to make evidence-based decisions as the internship program moves forward.

### **Project Strengths**

A program evaluation is meant to provide data that will help an organization make decisions (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2010; Spaulding, 2014). Program evaluations enable stakeholders to make evidence-based decisions that may quickly impact the current program and lead to future changes (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Lodico et al., 2010). Data collection and methodology used for this study were transparent due to disclosure of my role and the scope of the study in the Informed Consent forms and by using member checking. Member checking, triangulation of data, and peer debriefing also ensured the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. The

results of this study, in the form of the program evaluation report, will provide the institution with data intended to allow for evidence-based decision making (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

### **Limitations**

The most significant limitations of program evaluations are collecting accurate data and isolating the effects from the program. Isolating the effects is an effort to determine if the program is producing the reported effects or if there are other contributing factors (Phillips, 2010). This study could not completely isolate the effects because each student chose where they wanted to do the internship semester. There were many variables that may have influenced the students' success during internship including different locations, different mentors, and different interpreting opportunities.

This study included interviews with administrators who helped establish the internship program in 2002 as well as site directors and interns who participated during 2013-2015. Many factors contribute to the effectiveness of the internship semester including the age and experience of the participants, the various locations where internships took place, and the various mentors who worked with interns.

Trying to attribute results to any one factor can misrepresent the complex setting in which a program is implemented (Phillips, 2010). It is impossible to know all of the factors that may have influenced this evaluation. For example, some interns worked with only one mentor while other interns worked with several different mentors. The training and skill level of the various mentors is also unknown. Being unable to isolate the factors

leading to the reported effects is a limitation of this evaluation, in alignment with Phillips (2010).

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

Another approach that could have been used for this evaluation is a control group. A control group approach would consist of an experimental group that participated in the program and a control group that did not. Using a control group would have helped to isolate the effects that came from participation in the program by looking at data from participants who all worked with the same mentors and in the same location, assuring similar experiences (Phillips, 2010). The internship semester is a requirement for graduation; therefore, in this case, it was not possible to have a control group that did not participate in the program.

Another possibility was to use trend line analysis (Phillips, 2010). In a trend line approach, previous performance data would be used to establish the trend line. Once the program is started, actual performance and the projected performance are compared. If no new influences are introduced once the program begins, the effects can be reasonably attributed to the program being evaluated (Phillips, 2010). For this evaluation, there were no previous performance data to use in comparison with the years being studied, so it was impossible to perform trend line analysis.

### **Scholarship**

In the field of sign language interpreting, I have been considered an expert for many years. Others look to me for training and evaluation, I teach workshops around the country and I am the director of the interpreting program at a private college. However, I

would not have described myself as a scholar. Being the first in my family to attend a 4-year college, I assumed college would be difficult and perhaps beyond my ability. I felt that way during my baccalaureate program and during my master's program, even though I did very well. I put off working on a doctorate for many years because of my fear of the research.

I am good at what I do, teaching and interpreting. I would have said I am someone who does things; I do not just study them. Now looking back, I realize that the way I have always gotten things done is by studying the situation, planning a solution, putting the solution into practice, and then evaluating the outcome. I have always been a scholar but never framed my work in those words.

Because of my love of solving problems I was drawn to the practical approach of an EdD rather than a PhD and I felt that Walden's focus on social change fit very well with the mission of the college where I teach. I have found my work helping me with my doctoral studies and my doctoral studies helping me improve my program at work. My studies have also rekindled my love of learning in a very real way. I am already planning to do a certificate program in mentoring interpreters; there is always more to learn and more to teach.

I am already planning my next research project as well. That is something I would never have said before this study. I planned to do what I had to do to earn my degree and then never do research again. Throughout this rocky journey, I have come to enjoy research and to see the practical benefits of it. Interviewing people for this study gave me so much information and wonderful ideas for improving the internship program where I

teach. I am very interested in the topic of interpreter education and how it can and should prepare graduates for employment. I hope to continue to do research in this area.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

The biggest challenge for me was getting the big picture for what I needed to research in order to bring about positive change. I struggled to envision the study and I am the kind of person who needs to see the big picture first rather than just dive in and figure it out as I go. Because of that, the beginning of this study was slow going. Once I could see the path I needed to take I was able to move ahead and that is when my real learning began.

I can honestly say that I was not looking forward to doing interviews. I am an introvert and would rather email than talk, and would rather read books than have conversations. I learned that if two heads are better than one, how much better are 24 heads! The insights and ideas I gained from talking to 23 participants were astounding. I now feel like questions are not daunting and figuring out how to make changes does not rest only on my shoulders. Questions can lead to research, literature reviews, then to more questions; and I can talk with stakeholders to help me make decisions based on data.

### **Leadership and Change**

I have found a new meaning to the idea of leadership through this journey. Sometimes leaders are not out in front of the charge. Sometimes leaders are at home, in the middle of the night, at their computers, doing research.

I initially put off starting a doctorate because I was afraid of the research and writing. In many ways I was a hypocrite, encouraging my students to face new challenges and say yes to opportunities, while I said no over and over again. This doctoral program and research study have not been easy and I have made many mistakes. Still, I learned from those mistakes and I have gained a great deal of confidence in my own abilities as a scholar and researcher.

What I have learned about leadership and change is that we are never too old to take on new challenges, and the struggle itself is the victory. I feel I will be a much better leader for my students and my staff because I fought my way through this struggle. I have also learned that research is the foundation of change.

#### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

I did not think I could be considered a scholar; I was a practitioner. This doctoral program has given me the confidence I need to put myself in that group called scholars. I have always been a teacher, a mentor, a problem solver, and a lifelong learner. I now realize those words describe a scholar. I have not reached the end of my scholarship with this study or this degree. I can now see myself as a scholar and will continue to study and research in order to encourage social change.

#### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

I would have always described myself as a practitioner. The point of learning, for me, has always been to be able to do something with the knowledge. I enjoy learning but it always leads to another question or the need to change something, to make things better

for others. I am at my best when I am teaching or mentoring, when I am acting as a practitioner.

As a practitioner, I have always given less attention to theories and philosophies and placed more emphasis on skills. Conducting this research, reviewing the literature, and developing the program evaluation have helped me to really see the connection between theory and practice. I have a better understanding of how working to fully understand a problem and the possible solutions leads to better practice.

Something I have learned about myself is I am more capable than I think I am and I should not shy away from research because it is new and challenging. I was determined to do qualitative research because I did not think I could handle quantitative research. During this study, I realized that it might have been easier to do as a quantitative study. I am no longer afraid of research and am not limiting myself in what I can do. Being a good practitioner means finding the most effective way to do research as well as to improve the way I work.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

I have wanted to evaluate the internship program where I teach for the past six years. I did not know how to go about it or how to make impactful changes. I always talk to stakeholders and asked for ideas, but I did not know how to do it in a systematic and well-documented way. The step by step guidance of this doctoral program taught me how to gather information that could be used for data-based decision making.

I am very proud of this program evaluation and am excited about seeing the results used for positive change. The process took longer than I expected and had far



more steps than I had ever imagined. At times the need for revisions and approvals could be tedious and frustrating. However, all of that leads to an end product that can stand up to review, and that is a good feeling.

I realized I actually enjoy revisions. I often rewrite and revise things I am working on so the revisions of this program evaluation were, for the most part, enjoyable. Where I might have tried to develop a project in a “trial and error” approach in the past, I have developed a respect for the process of project development. Seeking to understand the problem, writing research questions, developing the questions for the interviews were all time consuming but ended up being so helpful when I was ready to conduct the interviews.

The program I evaluated is one I know intimately. I am the director of the program; I know all of the stakeholders and participants. In some ways that makes a program evaluation more difficult. There is so much to talk about with the participants; they have so much they would like to share. The preparation that happened first helped to keep the interview on track and narrow the study to a manageable size. The end product shows the strengths and weaknesses of the program and has specific practical recommendations for improvement. That could not have happened without a structured program evaluation.

### **The Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change**

The most exciting aspect of this project is the fact that information from 23 individuals, representing 14 different states all came together to bring about improvement in one program. There is no doubt that a program evaluation will help improve the

specific program that was evaluated. The report will provide the college with data and recommendations that will help them continue to improve the internship program and the entire interpreting program.

However, I believe this study can have much broader impact. I would like to present the findings of this study to the other participants of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT) which is a national organization. I can also write articles related to this work and future research that could reach members of CIT and help them to improve their own interpreting programs. There are still many programs that do not offer hands-on practice and supervised internship programs for their students. The findings in this study may provide those programs with data they can use to convince their institutions to make evidence-based decisions and improve their programs.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

This study will provide information to the institution as well to other researchers. The interpreting profession is still very young and has experienced many changes and frustrations. As colleges are striving to improve their programs, the data from this study may help them to grow.

Implications for future research include continuing to interview interns and site directors as part of an exit interview after the internship semester. There is a need to gather data from interpreting agencies that hire new graduates to ascertain what gaps in training they see in new interpreters. Deaf consumers should also be contacted for similar information. As stated earlier, the members of the Deaf community were the gatekeepers who invited skilled signers into the field of interpreting. As interpreter education moved

from the community to academic institutions, that connection and vetting process has been lost (Hunt & Nicodemus, 2014; Mathers & Witter-Merithew, 2014; Shaw, 2014). Research to determine what gaps the Deaf community members are seeing in the knowledge and skills of new interpreters would help to reestablish that natural vetting process.

### **Conclusion**

This section provided reflection on the strengths and limitations of the project study and consideration of ways to remediate the limitations. Also covered in this section were my analysis of myself as a scholar, practitioner, and program developer and how this study may make an impact locally and in a broader sense.

I have learned so much during this study. Of course, I learned about the topic and will be able to use the data collected to impact change in my work. However, I have also learned about research and about myself as a scholar and researcher. I have learned how to focus my questions into research and how to use data collection to lead to evidence-based decision making. I hope to continue doing research in the area of interpreter education and the transition to professional employment.

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Appendix A: Project

A Program Evaluation:

An American Sign Language Interpreting Internship Program

Evaluator:

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December 2016

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	120
Introduction to the Program Evaluation Report.....	121
Data Collection.....	123
Evidence of Quality.....	124
Data Analysis.....	125
Discussion of Results.....	127
Conclusions.....	132
Implications for Further Research.....	133
Summary of Recommendations.....	133
Conclusion.....	135

## **Executive Summary**

I conducted this program evaluation (PE) of an American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreting Internship program in partial fulfillment of Walden University's doctoral study requirements.

This PE was specifically designed to evaluate the internship program (IP) of the ASL Interpreting major in a small, private, faith-based college in the Midwest, referred to in this study as ABC College (pseudonym). The IP is the capstone course of the major and consists of working alongside one or mentors for a 12-week period. The primary goal of the IP is to prepare graduates to transition from college to the interpreting profession.

Using the lens of experiential learning theory popularized by David Kolb (Kolb & Kolb, 2012) I conducted an expertise-oriented program evaluation to collect data for this study. These data included a review of documents related to the IP as well as interviews of former administrators, graduates of the IP from the years 2013-2015, and internship site directors who worked with interns during the years of 2013-2015. The overall findings showed that the program provides interns with the opportunity to hone their interpreting skills and increase their knowledge of the profession which did prepare them for work after graduation. During this evaluation I examined the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the IP, the usefulness of the documents used during the semester, and how well the IP prepared the graduates for employment.

The Program evaluation report includes a summary of the results of data analysis as well as recommendations to improve the IP. Administrators and program faculty should review and implement the recommendations from this PE and continue to gather

data from graduating interns and site directors. This information will allow the administration and faculty to begin an ongoing cycle of evaluation, planning, implementation, and re-evaluation and to make evidence-based decisions that incorporate stakeholder feedback into the program.

Finally, the positive social change expected from this program evaluation is to increase the quality of interpreters for the Deaf community. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) projects the need for all interpreters to increase 29% by 2024. The demand for ASL interpreters is also expected to grow quickly because of the increase in opportunities for Deaf individuals in education and employment as well as the growth of Video Relay Services which provides live interpreters for online video calls. Traditionally graduates from interpreting programs have not had strong enough skills to obtain required credentials at the state or national level (Godfrey, 2011).

### **Introduction to the Program Evaluation Report**

Program evaluations are commonly used in evaluating academic programs and may be formal or informal. The goal of a program evaluation is to determine how well the provided services are meeting constituents' needs and to decide if a program should be continued, eliminated, or changed (Posavac, 2015). An expertise-oriented approach was used for this study with the researcher acting as an industry expert. The expertise-oriented program evaluation uses professional judgment as the main strategy for evaluating the quality of a program (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). This use of researcher as the evaluator is one way in which program evaluations differ from other types of research (Mertens & Wilson, 2012).

The local problem that prompted this evaluation was that the internship program in the ASL Interpreting program of a small, private college had not been formally evaluated since it was started in 2002. As reported on the college website, the capstone experience for this 4-year program is a 12-week internship where each student works alongside one or more on-site mentors. The internship semester was designed to provide graduates with a successful transition from classroom learning to professional employment. However, there is no standardized system to monitor the effectiveness of the internship program in preparing students for professional employment.

### **Stakeholders/Audiences**

The intended audiences for this program evaluation report are the college administrators who have are accountable to oversee the college programs and report to the Higher Learning Commission, the director of the ASL Interpreting program who supervises the Internship Program, the faculty of the ASL Interpreting program, the students in the program, and the admissions department staff who recruit students for the program. The needs of various stakeholders have been considered in this program evaluation. Administrators, program director, and faculty are interested in the outcomes and impacts of a program. Students are interested in acquiring the skills they need to obtain employment after graduation, and the admissions staff members are interested in both the outcomes and the employment statistics of graduates in order to promote the program to future students.

## **Data Collection**

Qualitative research data were gathered for this study. Data included a review of documents used for the internship program. Additional data were gathered through 23 semistructured interviews with former administrators, graduates from 2013-2015, and internship site directors who worked with interns during 2013-2015. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and manually coded to determine themes in the participants' perceptions of the program's strengths and weaknesses and the effectiveness in preparing interns for professional employment.

### **Interviews**

A purposeful sampling technique was used to identify potential participants (Creswell, 2012). Of the possible interviewees, 23 agreed to participate. These included two former administrators, 13 former interns, and eight internship site directors. The former interns represented three different graduating classes with four from 2013, five from 2014, and four from the 2015 class. The internship site directors represented agencies located in seven states and the District of Columbia.

After the informed consent document was signed and returned, a time was set up for each interview. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face while others were done via phone or Skype. The semistructured interviews were conducted using separate questions outlined in interview protocols for each group: administrators, former interns, site directors (Creswell, 2012). Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was audio recorded. The transcriptions of the interviews were emailed to each participant for review. There were no adverse effects noted during the interviews.



## **Documents**

The documents that were reviewed were part of a manual that is given to site directors and interns. Reviewed documents were policies, contracts, program objectives, and the semester evaluations done by internship site directors and students. Reviewing documents can be a source of valuable information (Creswell, 2012). I examined these documents while referring to issues that were raised during the interviews. The review of documents helped to identify categories that relate to the research questions, as recommended by Bowen (2009). Notes were taken, summarized, and transferred into a chart using a color-coding system which helped with data analysis.

## **Evidence of Quality**

In this study, three methods were used to validate findings: triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing, in alignment with Creswell's recommendations (2012). Triangulation involves using more than one source; in this study my data triangulation included conducting interviews with three different groups of participants as well as a review of documents. Member checking ensures accuracy by asking participants to review a transcript draft to verify that their intentions were accurately portrayed. One participant indicated some additional information that was added to their transcript. The other participants verified that the transcripts represented their intentions.

I also used a peer with over 30 years of interpreting experience who has also taught interpreting at the college level to review my findings. Participant identity was unknown to the reviewer who was required to sign a confidentiality agreement. The use of another person to verify interpretation increases the credibility of findings (Creswell,

2012). The peer reviewer confirmed that my conclusions and recommendations were supported by the interview data.

Data analysis was done through manual coding. The data were analyzed in relationship to the research questions:

1. What do the stakeholders describe as the strengths and weaknesses of the internship program?
2. In what ways do the policies, objectives, and assignments of the internship program, as presented in the Internship Manual, prepare students to work as an intern?
3. In what ways does the internship program prepare students for employment as professional sign language interpreters?

Data was further reviewed to assure that nothing was overlooked and there was no discrepant data. The use of more than one analysis technique and multiple sources of data ensured the accuracy and credibility of the study findings.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Interviews**

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and then manually coded. The interviews were evaluated for key words, phrases, and themes (Merriam, 2009). I used four different coding methods: Structural Coding, Descriptive Coding, In Vivo Coding, and Emotion Coding. Structural coding helps to create initial categories and is useful in studies that have multiple participants. Descriptive coding uses a word or phrase to summarize the topic of a passage. In vivo coding captures the actual language of the

participant in order to honor their voice in highlighted phrases. Emotion coding documents the emotions recalled by the participants or inferred by the researcher (Saldana, 2013). Coding for this study was complicated because I interviewed three distinct groups of participants with different interview questions. Each group of questions had to be coded separately through all four coding cycles.

As analysis continued, some codes were combined or discarded. Meaningful patterns emerged and were sorted into categories. Rules were defined to determine which data fit into each category (Saldana, 2013). From the categories, themes were identified by finding repeated expressions, similarities, and differences. Through this process I identified five themes:

1. Interns are well prepared and generally have adequate information to be successful during internship; however, they lack confidence and therefore feel unprepared.
2. The documents used for internship (contracts, policies, semester evaluation in the internship manual) are helpful but difficult to use.
3. Mentors need guidance and training related to giving constructive feedback.
4. Internship provides interns with real world experience that is similar to what they will do as professional interpreters.
5. Site directors and interns suggestions for improving the internship program.

### **Documents**

Documents were reviewed using the same categories that had emerged during the interview coding. Common characteristics were identified to sort data from the

documents into categories. I looked for connections between the documents and interview responses that related to the procedures and preparation for internship, as well as the evaluation of the internship semester. The goal was to identify gaps in the documents that would help the internship process be more successful.

### **Discussion of Results**

Programs should produce tangible results or it should be modified or discontinued (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Data collected and analyzed during the study indicated that the internship program is producing positive results but needs to be modified in several areas. The identified themes have been analyzed using the three research questions as a guide.

**Theme 1: Interns are well prepared and generally have adequate information to be successful during internship; however, they lack confidence and therefore feel unprepared.**

The former interns recognized the benefit of the coursework and interpreting practice they had in the program. The many hours of practice interpreting they did on campus and in the community prepared them for internship. However, they also identified lack of confidence as the main reason they did not feel they were ready for internship. One former intern summed it up by saying, “Going, I didn’t think I was ready, it was a confidence problem. Looking back, I really was ready.” The site directors noted that the interns were generally well prepared. Their skills were as expected for senior interpreting students and would improve during the internship semester. Several directors

praised what they called “soft skills” such as good professional ethics, motivation to learn, flexibility, and a positive attitude.

**Theme 2: The documents used for internship (contracts, policies, semester evaluation in the internship manual) are helpful but difficult to use.**

The former interns primarily focused on the documents that helped them stay organized and keep track of required hours and assignments. One former intern stated, “It was a Godsend for students like me who have learning disabilities and need things laid out visually!” Many of them stated that they did not really remember the contracts or policies. The former interns did appreciate the opportunity to reflect on their work and provide feedback through the end of semester evaluation.

The site directors raised concerns about the usability of the internship manual although several said they were very grateful that the college provided them with detailed information. One suggestion was, “Make it more interpreter friendly with graphics, bolded areas, arrows, and a summary page or chart for each section and the details behind it.” Similar suggestions were made by other site directors. Another suggestion was that the Memo of Understanding (MOU) include more detail about the required hours for interpreting and other activities for which the students were responsible. The site directors also appreciated the end of the semester evaluation, however, they would like to have more opportunity to write comments or answer open-ended questions. Two directors suggested that an exit interview would be a better way to gather data for both the college and the internship agency.

**Theme 3: Mentors need guidance and training related to giving constructive feedback.**

The site directors and interns had very different responses related to mentor training. The site directors generally did not feel there was a need for the college to provide mentor training. They cited trainings in their areas that mentors could attend. However, these trainings are not provided by the internship agency, are not required, and are not specific to the ideas of mentoring or using experiential learning theory.

The former interns named the need for mentor training as their top concern. They mentioned that mentors did not know how to give constructive feedback. In some cases, the mentors gave very little feedback and some were critical and not supportive. The former interns felt it would be helpful for the college to provide training and to require it for at least the main mentor with whom they worked.

Some of the former interns interviewed worked with many different mentors. This was seen as positive in some ways because different interpreters have different styles, accept different types of assignments, and provide different feedback. However, some former interns had so many different mentors that they felt no one saw their progress or growth. They would prefer one person be their main mentor who works with them frequently during the semester while still having the opportunity to work with a variety of interpreters. Another suggestion was that the college provide a feedback form to give to each interpreter with whom they work. The items on the form would help to guide the feedback process.

**Theme 4: Internship provides interns with real world experience that is similar to what they will do as professional interpreters.**

Former interns and site directors agreed that the internship semester gives the interns a great deal of real world experience and prepares them for professional employment. One director said, “Internship helps them see the wide spectrum of environments. More than you can learn in school.” Another director stated, “It helps them realize what is really important. We rarely get complaints about someone’s actual skills. More often complaints are about all the other soft skills.”

The former interns talked about how internship gave them an understanding of what the day-to-day life of a professional interpreter was like. Many said they are now doing the same kinds of assignments they did during internship so they were able to begin professional work with more confidence. Confidence is also developed during the internship when the interns start by observing the work of professional interpreters. The interns then begin doing some interpreting and increasing the amount of interpreting they do as skills and confidence grow. By the end of the semester, the intern would be doing the entire assignment with the mentor only observing. The gradual increase of responsibility until they were totally responsible for assignments aided in the transition to professional employment.

**Theme 5: Site directors and interns suggestions for improving the internship program.**

The former interns recognize that the interpreting program at this college gave them a good foundation. Looking back at their internship experience now that they have

been working as professionals, they can see the benefit of their internship and also make suggestions to improve the program. Several former interns said they wish they had more hours of interpreting experience and a greater variety of experiences. One suggested that specific guidelines be included that identify areas of interpreting opportunities that should be provided for interns.

Another suggestion was to include more training about getting started in business and how to handle taxes. Many professional interpreters are self-employed and the former interns indicated that they were not prepared for the business aspects of the interpreting profession. One intern thought a weekly discussion question would be helpful during the internship semester. The interns are located in different cities and a discussion board would keep them connected and help them share their experiences rather than wait until they returned to campus. Finally, they had suggestions for future students. They suggested interns say yes to everything. One former intern said, “Try everything on internship. You have a safety net with a mentor.”

The site directors suggested the program faculty practice “what if” scenarios with students before internship. Professors should give students examples of some of the unexpected things that can happen during internship and discuss how they might handle those situations. One director suggested students have Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) training before internship so they are ready to work in hospitals and medical offices. The directors agreed with former interns that the students need more training about business and taxes. They also felt interns should develop an



online ePortfolio or website that could be used as part of the internship application process and also be used when seeking professional employment.

### **Conclusions**

Findings from the document review and the interviews supported each other. Participants appreciated the effort invested in developing the internship manual and preparing the students for internship. They praised the work that has already been done to create a strong internship program and also offered many suggestions to help the program continue to grow.

The internship site directors focused their suggestions on improving the application process and the internship manual. They also contributed ideas to better prepare the students for internship and employment. The former interns also had suggestions for improving the program. Their main concern was that the internship semester offer a wide variety of interpreting assignments and that the mentors receive training to improve their ability to provide constructive feedback.

One area that the former interns, administrators, and site directors agreed upon was that the internship semester prepares students for professional employment. Interns are able to observe their mentors and discuss the profession. They then move into interpreting more of the assignments as their skills and confidence grow. The assignments they interpret as an intern mirror the work they will do as a new interpreter. All three groups of participants agreed that the hands-on practice is the foundation of the internship and prepares the interns to become entry level professional interpreters.

### **Implications for Further Research**

During this program evaluation, I examined documents currently used by the ASL Interpreting major internship program and conducted 23 one-to-one interviews. The interviews included two former administrators, 12 former interns who graduated between the years 2013-2015, and eight internship site directors who worked with those interns. The data gathered may be used for evidence-based decision making for this program.

Further studies should include data gathered from other stakeholders. One group of stakeholders includes the individuals who hire new interpreters at various agencies throughout the country. A survey sent to interpreter referral agencies could ask questions related to the gaps these agency personnel see in the skills and knowledge of new interpreters. A similar study could be conducted by surveying members of the Deaf community and asking the same types of questions regarding gaps in skill and knowledge of new interpreters.

Data gathered from these two groups would help to identify further gaps in training and experience among new interpreters. These data could be compared to findings from ongoing evaluations of the internship program. This comparison would allow the college to continue to improve the internship program as well as the entire ASL Interpreting major to better prepare graduates to meet the needs of the Deaf community and the hiring entities.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

The recommendations of this researcher for improving the ASL Interpreting Internship program have been organized into six categories. The categories are

Preinternship Training, Application Process, Internship Manual, Internship Semester, and Professional Employment. Table 1 summarizes the recommendations for each of these categories.

Table 1

*Summary of Recommendations for the ASL Interpreting Internship Program*

Categories	Recommendations
Pre-internship Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role play scenarios that may happen during internship</li> <li>• Add more preparation regarding the logistics, agency, and city where the student will be doing their internship</li> <li>• Require students to complete an online HIPAA training prior to internship</li> <li>• Develop a short description of the internship program and benefits to the students and the community that can be given to clients.</li> </ul>
Application Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add a list of course and interpreting theories (with a short description) required in the interpreting major</li> <li>• Include a list of practice interpreting the student has done on the resume</li> <li>• Include a professor's assessment of the skills of each student applying for internship</li> </ul>
The Internship Manual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the manual more visually appealing and easier to use</li> <li>• Add a summary page at the beginning of each section</li> <li>• Remove redundant or unnecessary information</li> <li>• Use graphs or charts to replace lengthy passages when possible</li> <li>• Clarify how to count intern interpreting hours</li> <li>• Add a Memo of Understanding for interns</li> <li>• Add more open-ended questions to the semester evaluation</li> </ul>
Mentor Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign one point person for each intern and require that the intern and point person meet</li> </ul>

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	<p>weekly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and online training module that prospective mentors must complete prior to working with an intern</li> <li>• The training module should include information about experiential learning, giving constructive feedback, and the program's expectations</li> </ul>
Internship Semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop suggested areas of interpreting to which each intern should be exposed</li> <li>• Gather data from potential agencies regarding types of interpreting assignments available, amount of driving required, and cost of living</li> <li>• As part of an exit interview require students to write an essay about their experience including advice for future interns</li> </ul>
Professional Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add a required business course to the ASL Interpreting major curriculum</li> <li>• Develop a one credit course covering developing a website and ePortfolio as well as other marketing and business management tools</li> </ul>

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### **Conclusion**

This program evaluation is the first formal assessment of the ASL Interpreting Internship program. Findings indicate that interns have the skills and knowledge needed to secure employment after graduation. These new interpreters are well trained in interpreting skills, awareness of the needs of the Deaf community, and the importance of professional ethics for sign language interpreters. The hands-on experience of the internship semester was noted as a primary reason for the ability level of the graduates. However, data also indicated some gaps in the skills and knowledge of graduates and suggested areas for improvement.

The program evaluation report provides a framework for making evidence-based decisions to improve the internship semester. Specific recommendations were made

regarding the training students receive prior to internship, the application process, the internship manual given to interns and site directors, training for mentors, the internship semester, and ways to improve access to professional employment. These recommendations, as well as further research, will strengthen the internship program and ensure the sustainability of the ASL Interpreting major.

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Agency Directors

**Interview Protocol**

Introductory questions:

1. How many students from this program have done internships at your location?
2. Do you have an established internship program?

Questions:

3. What information or preparation did you receive prior to accepting a student as an intern?
4. Do you feel you had enough information from the college to successfully work with the student intern? Why or why not?
  - a. What further information would have helped make the internship more successful?
5. In what ways was the internship manual helpful?
  - a. Did the policies clearly define your role and responsibilities?
  - b. Were the intern evaluations and due dates clearly defined?
  - c. In what ways was the semester evaluation helpful or not helpful?
  - d. Can you suggest any additional information that would be helpful?
6. How did you decide which mentor(s) would work with the intern?
  - a. In what way would more input from the college supervisor helped in choosing a mentor for each student?
  - b. What additional information would have been helpful?
7. Can you describe any training the mentors received prior to working with a student intern?
  - a. In what ways might it have been helpful if the college provided training for mentors regarding our expectations?
8. How did you decide what assignments were appropriate for the student intern?
  - a. In what ways would more input from the college supervisor regarding appropriate assignments for the intern have been helpful?
  - b. What additional information would have been helpful?
9. How would you describe the experience of working with a student from this program?
  - a. How did you oversee the intern/mentor working relationship?
  - b. Can you describe some of the variety of assignments and experiences you were able to provide for the student(s)?
10. In what ways did the internship experience prepare the intern for employment?
11. Looking back, do you feel there are ways the internship could have been more beneficial in helping the student transition to professional employment?
  - a. What suggestions do you have to help internship program improve?

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Former Administrators

**Interview Protocol**

## Introductory questions:

1. When were you involved with the ASL Interpreting program?
2. Why was the interpreting program started?
  - a. What needs were identified?
3. Did you supervise internship semesters?

## Questions:

4. What were the reasons for having an internship semester?
  - a. What needs did you see at the time?
5. What were your goals for the internship program?
  - a. For the students, the college, and the internship sites
6. Can you describe the process for placing interns?
7. What information did you provide for the interns and the internship sites?
  - a. Did you have an internship manual then?
  - b. What input did you have in choosing specific mentors for each student?
8. What changes were made to the internship program while you were involved?
9. How do you think the internship experience prepare the interns for employment?
10. Looking back, do you feel there are ways the internship could have been more beneficial in helping the student transition to professional employment?
  - a. What suggestions do you have to help the current internship program improve?

## Appendix D: Interview Protocol for Former Interns

**Interview Protocol**

## Introductory questions:

1. What year did you participate in an internship?
2. Where did you do your internship?
3. Are you currently employed as a sign language interpreter?
  - a. If so, are you a staff interpreter or an independent contractor?
  - b. If you are not working as an interpreter, why have you left the profession?
4. What state or national credentials do you hold?

## Questions:

5. In what ways did your internship prepare you for professional employment?
  - a. Did you have enough practice during internship?
  - b. How did the types of assignments you did during internship help you, or not help you in employment?
  - c. Can you suggest additional assignments or opportunities you wish you had during internship?
6. What training or preparation did you receive prior to internship?
7. Do you feel you had enough information before internship in order to be prepared and successful?
  - a. What further information would have helped you feel more successful?
8. In what ways was the internship manual helpful?
  - a. Did the policies clearly define your role and responsibilities?
  - b. Were the assignments and due dates clearly defined?
  - c. In what ways was the semester evaluation helpful or not helpful?
  - d. Can you suggest any additional information that would be helpful?
9. Did you work with one mentor exclusively, or did you have more than one mentor?
  - a. If you had more than one mentor, how well did they communicate with each other?
  - b. Can you suggest areas of training you feel mentors should be given before working with interns?
  - c. What suggestions do you have to improve the experience of working with mentors?
10. Looking back, do you feel there are ways the internship could have been more beneficial to your transition to professional employment?
  - a. What suggestions do you have to help internship program improve?



## Appendix E: Document Review Instrument

Document	Review questions
Internship Policies	<p>Do the published policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clearly define the roles of all participants?</li> <li>• list all objectives for the internship?</li> <li>• define and explain the objectives?</li> <li>• explain the expectations and responsibilities for the college supervisor, interns, mentors, and site directors?</li> <li>• clearly outline deliverables and due dates for site directors and interns?</li> </ul> <p>What additional information do participants need to be more successful during the internship?</p>
Contracts	<p>Do the contracts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meet the criteria and include all information required to be a contract?</li> <li>• clearly outline the expectations and responsibilities for each participant?</li> <li>• include information regarding consequences for not meeting the responsibilities?</li> </ul>
Semester evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the semester evaluation allow participants to express their views regarding the internship?</li> <li>• Is the Likert-type scale effective?</li> <li>• Do the questions focus on the experience of the interns?</li> <li>• What questions should be eliminated from the evaluation?</li> <li>• What questions should be added to the evaluation?</li> <li>• Should there be different evaluations for interns, site directors, and mentors?</li> </ul> <p>What would be a more effective way for participants to evaluate their experience?</p>