Reflect on Thyself: Interns' Reflection upon Their Strengths and Weaknesses

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Political science internships are a valuable tool through which interns are able to gain relevant work experience while also gaining hands-on experience with material from their course work. One key element to a successful internship is an interns' ability to meet the needs of the sponsoring organization in terms of the skills and tools they hold. While previous research (see for e.g., McQueen, Jenkins, and Wiley 2021) has focused on those skills that make interns more valuable to sponsoring organizations, we know little about interns' ability to evaluate themselves on those skillsets. In this paper we use data from on-site supervisor evaluations of interns' performance and interns' own evaluations of their performance to investigate how accurately interns evaluate their performance in their internship. Interns' ability to accurately reflect upon their performance is critical for their ability to improve in the future and adapt to changing desires. Findings from this research may suggest potential interventions to help interns' further improve their performance.

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Introduction

Internships are increasingly part of the undergraduate college experience and provide a valuable learning opportunity for students. There are many long-term benefits from holding an internship, including work experience (Schomburg and Teichler 2011; Silva et al. 2016) and skill development, time management, communication skills, self-discipline, teamwork, problem-solving, and learning initiative (Dennis, 1996: Healy & Mourton 1987; Kane, Healy, &Henson 1992; Taylor, 1988; Routon and Walker 2018). Scholars know much less about the skill of self-evaluation in the internship experience.

Self-evaluation is not only a critical part of the learning process but also a valuable skill in the workforce. Being able to accurately self-monitor and correct one's work distinguishes novices from experts (Gagne, Yekovich, & Yekovich 1993). Reflection is an essential metacognitive skill and can promote intrinsic motivation and a more meaningful learning experience (McMillian and Hearn 2008). Despite this importance, research on student self-assessment has not expanded into the internship realm. Much of the extant self-evaluation literature focuses on how students can predict a grade or test score (Dunlosky et al. 1994; Meeter and Nelson 2003; Thiede and Dunlosky 1999), rather than student assessment of skills or performance. Multiple scholars have encouraged investigation of students' evaluation of their abilities rather than grade estimation (Ward et al. 2002; Boud and Falchikov 1989). This paper directly addresses that gap by investigating how accurately students can self-assess their skills and performance during an internship.

Investigating this question is critical for pragmatic and scholarly reasons. Pragmatically, exploring if students can accurately evaluate their performance in internships can provide valuable information. A large discrepancy in assessment would indicate a greater need for

additional feedback measures or additional training on self-assessment techniques. From a scholarly standpoint, understanding other ways in which students engage in self-assessment can contribute to literatures on internship, student self-evaluation, student experiences, and more.

The Literature on Student Self Evaluations

In its simplest form, self-evaluation is feedback (Andrade, 2010). Panadero et al. (2016) define self-evaluation as a "wide variety of mechanisms and techniques through which students describe and possibly assign merit or worth to the qualities of their own learning processes and products" (p. 804). The act of evaluation involves three related components that occur in a cyclical process: self-monitoring, self-judgment, and identification and implementation of instructional correctives (McMillan and Hearn 2008).

Although the search for "objective truth" is a contested one (Ward et al. 2002), generally comparing a student's self-assessment against the judgment of an externally administered judge (be it a test, teacher, or peers) can be used to evaluate student's accuracy in self-assessment (Topping 2003). Educators can utilize a range of self-evaluation activities such as estimating a grade, using a rubric to provide self-feedback, or even circling a corresponding facial expression after reading a short story. However, the three skills of self-monitoring, self-judgment, and correction in self-evaluation can be difficult to cultivate for a student, and we cannot be sure of their validity in evaluating their own work.

The scholarship on the accuracy of students' self-evaluations is mixed. Some evidence suggests students overestimate their performance (Tejeiro et al. 2012), while others suggest students underestimate their performance (Aleksandr Karnick et al. 2021). In contrast, other scholars find that students are reasonably good at estimating their own performance (Falchikov and Boud's 1989; Atwater & Yammarino, 1997), matching external evaluators such as professors

(Lopez and Kossack 2007; Barney et al., 2012; Leach 2012), teachers (Bol et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2012), researchers (Panadero and Romero, 2014), and expert medical assessors (Hawkins et al., 2012; Kardash 2000).

Some of this variation can be explained by acknowledging that certain conditions improve or impair a student's ability to accurately self-assess their performance. Identity seems to play a role, as female students, White students, and students from working-class backgrounds (Holloway et al. 2009) tend to underestimate their performance. Additionally, experience is also critical. Novices and less-experienced learners can overestimate their performance (Kruger and Dunning 1999; Falchikov and Boud 1989), while interns performing above-average tend to assess themselves more negatively than average performers (Karnick et al., 2021). Positively, with practice, students can increasingly self-assess accurately (Dochy et al. 1999). Finally, students who receive iterative feedback on the same task are likely to get better at accurately self-assessing their performance (Fitzgerald et al 2003). Although there. Is a recognition that various conditions impact self-assessment, there is very little research on students' ability to accurately self-assess in experiential learning environments, such as internships.

Internship Program at The George Washington University

The data for this analysis came from surveys of students enrolled in Political Science (PSC) 2987 and their internship sponsors in the Spring and Fall semesters in 2022. PSC 2987 is open to any undergraduate at GW who is a declared PSC major with at least junior standing and may be registered for 1, 2, or 3 credits in a semester depending on the number of hours per week spent interning. The PSC Director of Undergraduate Studies is faculty sponsor for all PSC 2987 students, reviews the internship learning objectives prior to registration, and monitors the students monthly via email or in person meetings. The student writes a paper at the end of the

semester, completes a self-evaluation survey, and has the on-site internship supervisor submit an evaluation to the Director of Undergraduate studies. Grades for PSC 2987 are assigned pass/fail. No more than three credits of PSC 2987 may count as upper-level elective credit towards the PSC major.

Data and Methods

At the end of each semester, we asked on-site internship supervisors to provide an evaluation of their intern's performance during the internship. They evaluated interns using a five-point scale on the following eight criteria: the intern's dependability, their work ethic, their attendance/punctuality, their usefulness to the organization, how effectively they worked with others, the quantity of the work they produced, the quality of the work they produced, and their level of initiative. In addition, we gave supervisors the opportunity to provide open-ended responses to clarify their numeric evaluations on any of the criteria, as well as the opportunity to provide information about projects the intern completed over the semester, the intern's performance, areas for improvement, as well as offer any additional comments or observations. During the Spring and Fall 2022 semesters, interns were asked to complete a self-evaluation responding to a similar version of those questions. Both the on-site supervisor evaluation and intern self-evaluation forms are available in Appendix A.[1] Together, these data allow us to create intern-supervisor dyads of the interns' self-evaluations and that of their on-site supervisor's evaluations. These dyads make up our unit of analysis. We yielded 66 intern-supervisor dyads, 34 from the Spring and 32 from the Fall. Below we report on the preliminary analysis of these dyads.

Analysis and Results

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[1] This study was approved by GWU's IRB, IRB #NCR224336

Below we present the results from this initial study. We first present the results of the interns' self-evaluations, followed by the evaluations of their on-site supervisors, and finally, an investigation of the differences between the interns' self-evaluations and on-site supervisor evaluations.

On average, interns worked 311.49 hours during the semester, ranging from 18 to 1000 hours.[2] Internships lasted 16.7 weeks, on average, ranging from 8 to just over 51.[3] Interns worked at a variety of locations, including offices of members of Congress, campaigns, media organizations, NGOs, lobbying organizations, law firms, and small and large corporations, among other organizations. About 69% of Fall internships were paid (we did not ask this question in the Spring). All interns and on-site supervisors responded that they believed the intern should receive credit for the internship, with the exception of one non-response from an on-site supervisor.
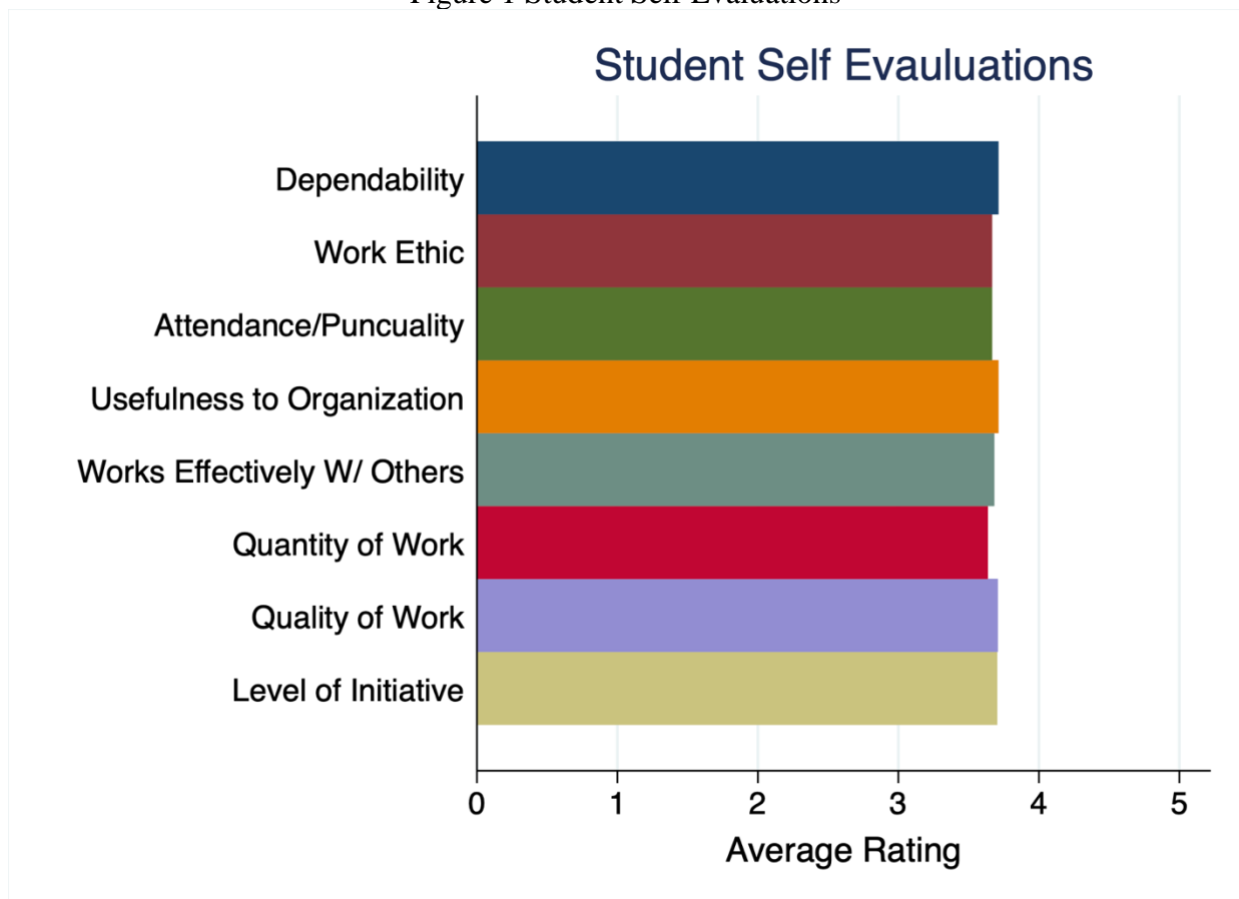
Interns' Self-Evaluations

As mentioned above, interns evaluated their performance during their internship along eight different criteria: their dependability, their work ethic, their attendance/punctuality, their usefulness to the organization, how effectively they worked with others, the quantity of the work they produced, the quality of the work they produced, and their level of initiative. Figure 1 provides the average intern self-ratings on all eight criteria. At first glance, what's most notable is the relative stability of the average rating across items. The average self-rating from interns

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[2] Much of this variation, particularly at the extreme ends is accounted for by varying lengths of the individual internships and how much longer students had left in their internship when the supervisor completed the evaluation. The "18" is likely a misreport of the total number of hours worked as the number of hours per week. Dropping it does not substantively change the average.

[3] Much of this variation is accounted for by students starting their internships before or after the semester started. After the student reporting 51 weeks, the next highest number of weeks was 36, which was the result of a student starting their internship at the end of the Spring semester and working through the end of the Fall semester.

across all measures is above 3.5, ranging from a low average of 3.63 (quantity of work) to a high of 3.71 (tied between "dependability" and "usefulness to organization"). Across all items, the lowest value any student gave themself was a 2, the highest a 5.

Figure 1 Student Self Evaluations

On-Site Supervisor Evaluations

On-site supervisors were also asked to evaluate interns' performance along the same eight criteria as above. Figure 2 presents the average on-site supervisor ratings of their interns on all eight criteria. As with student self-assessments, there's relatively minimal variation in the average on-site supervisor ratings across items, although the on-site supervisors tended to rate the interns' performance much higher, on average. The lowest average rating, 4.61, is for "level

of initiative." The item receiving the highest on-site supervisor average rating, 4.89 is "Works effectively with others." Across all eight criteria, no on-site supervisor rated their intern below a 2. These findings align with previous work (McQueen, Jenkins, and Wiley 2021) on how on-site supervisors evaluate their interns, most notably that, on average, on-site supervisors tend to highly value the contributions of their interns.

Figure 2. On-Site Supervisor Evaluations
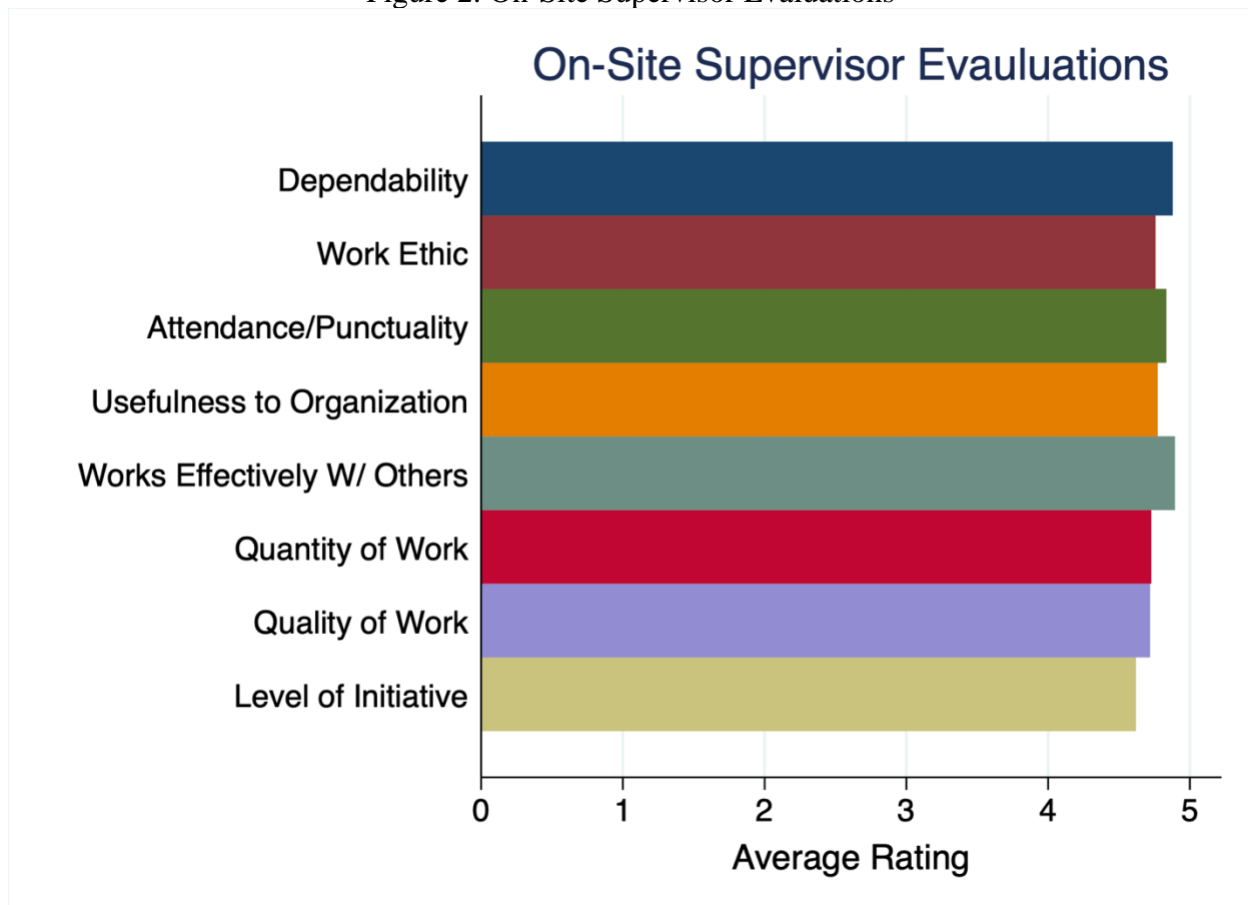
Comparing Intern and On-Site Supervisor Evaluations

Presented here are the average deviations of the on-site supervisors' ratings of the intern from the intern's self-assessment. Positive deviations suggest that, on average, interns rated themselves higher on that criterion than did the on-site supervisors. Negative evaluations suggest

that, on average, the interns rated themselves lower than did the on-site supervisors. Figure 3 depicts the average deviations for all eight criteria.

Turning to the average deviations, two patterns immediately stand out. First, for all of the eight criteria, the deviations are negative, suggesting that interns' self-evaluations deviated from those of their supervisor by being lower than their supervisor's. Second, most of these deviations are moderately substantial in size, around one-point on five-item scales. This would suggest substantial disagreement between how the on-site supervisors and their interns evaluate the interns' performance.

Figure 3. Average Evaluation Deviations
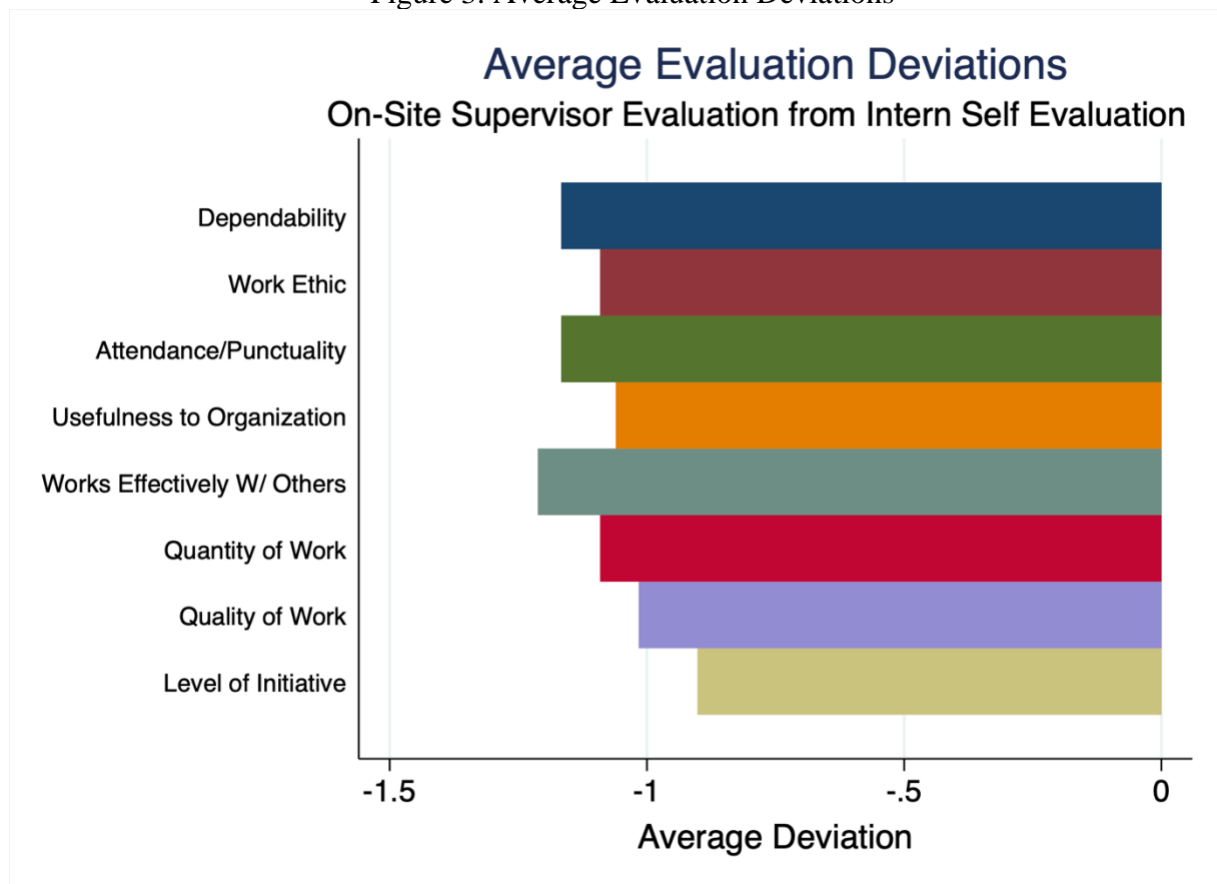
Comparing Qualitative Responses

To further investigate the discrepancy for quality of work, we turn to two open response questions. The first asks supervisors and interns to identify the major tasks the intern worked on during the semester. The second question asks supervisors and interns to provide recommendations for improving the intern's work performance.

When asked about what responsibilities the intern held during the internship, many of the interns and supervisors discussed multiple activities students engaged in, suggesting a great depth and diversity of internship activity. Supervisors and interns alike used phrases like "Among her many duties" or "there was no typical week at XX". The top 10 frequently used words in Table 1 suggests both interns and supervisors note a large amount of research and writing activity, a similar finding to McQueen, Jenkins, and Wiley (2021). When comparing across dyads, about 76% of students and supervisors matched in content.[4]

Table 1. Top 10 Most Frequent Words Used			
Supervisors		Student Interns	
Word	Count	Word	Count
Work	36	Work	35
Staff	24	Responsible	21
Project	23	Research	19
Research	22	Project	18
Help	21	Time	16
Task	17	Write	15
Response	17	Event	14
Time	15	Legislation	13
Memo	15	Well	12
Intern	13	Create	12

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[4] Example of a match and a non-match codes are located in the Appendix.

It is likely when supervisors and interns did not match in the duties reported it is the result of interns having a multiplicity of jobs, as supervisors and interns alike used phrases such as, "Among her many duties" or "there was no typical week at XX". Alternatively, the no match could reflect poor communication on the supervisor for what an intern is doing during the internship, or poor insight from the student. For example, one supervisor wrote, "This was XXX's first month working part time on the job and she is still getting used to name tag & memo formats and process in the office" while the intern wrote that they " planned, executed, and staffed campaign fundraising events for my clients throughout Washington, D.C. … …I had extreme success learning how to effectively pitch and execute fundraising ideas while ensuring fundraising goals were met or exceeded." These comments appear dramatically different in how the supervisor and intern viewed the work being completed at the internship site.

When supervisors and interns were asked what recommendations for improvement they suggest for the intern (the interns are self-evaluating their performance), there was a similar tone but less cohesion in content discussed. A sentiment analysis reveals similar emotions reflected in both responses from interns and supervisors. Overwhelmingly, these recommendations are positive and highlight joy, anticipation, and trust. Interestingly, student responses are slightly more negative and less joyful compared to supervisor responses.

Figure 4. What areas of improvement do you recomend for the intern?
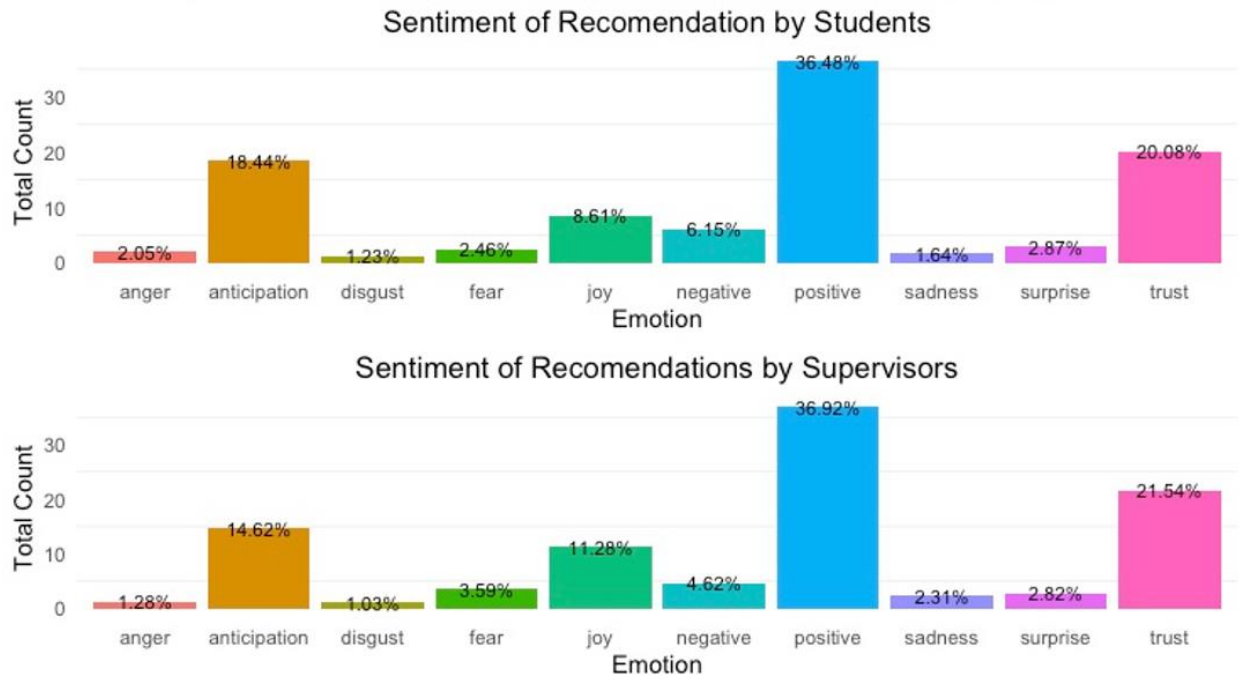
To better understand the discrepancy in negativity, we hand-coded the responses to assess similarity and found that recommendations from the supervisors and interns only matched in content about 30% of the time.[5] The mis-matched responses often reflect different topics mentioned by supervisors compared to interns. For example, a group of responses suggested that the supervisor wanted the student to seek more opportunities or take more initiative. Conversely, many of the student's recommendations for themselves is to focus on time management, balance, and stress. One supervisor recommends the student "Asks for more" while the student recommends, they "Don't overwhelm yourself next semester. When you do too much, something always falls through the cracks." Similarly, another student is encouraged by their supervisor to take advantage of more networking opportunities, but the student's self-recommendation is, "If I were to redo my time … I would have taken a gap year and worked full time instead of trying to juggle 22 hours a week, 3 other classes and running D1 Track and Field. I would say that I did

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[5] Examples of matching and nonmatching codes are located in the Appendix Table 2.

the best with my given circumstances, but boy am I burnt out!" These disparities may also suggest different lenses through which on-site supervisors and interns view the internship, the former through the lens of the intern's position in the organization and the organization's needs, and the latter as one part of their greater college experience.

Occasionally, the different recommendations that interns and supervisors mention suggest a breakdown in communication. For example, one supervisor writes, "X was a fine intern overall, but there were instances where they could have shown more initiative. One of the long-term projects is helping our media team gather news clips to send to a governor campaign, and he did not contribute very many during his shifts or ask many questions." Conversely, the student's self-recommendation is to "Pick earlier hours. By the time my shift came around, there frequently was not enough intern work, so it was more of an on-call situation." There appears to be a mismatch of expectations or what work was required.

Another element contributing to the slightly more negative student response is that 48% of these dyad responses involved the student more harshly critiquing their own work, while the supervisor provides no negative feedback. For example, one supervisor writes that the intern "performed well in a very substantive and fast paced environment" while the intern writes that "The primary recommendation that I have for myself would be to stay on top of tracking smaller things that the position requires…sometimes it is hard to remember less pressing things like filling out the project tracker that we use or turning on my out of office on my email. I think that improving on these smaller things is important, and it is something that I have been making a conscious effort of addressing." These more critical responses from interns likely contribute to the higher negativity rating.

Conclusion

Overall, we find that interns on average rate themselves substantially lower than their on-site supervisors do, by about one-point on average across evaluation items. Additionally,

There are many possible reasons for this variation between interns' self-assessment and supervisor evaluation. First, these results suggest that on-site supervisors may wish to communicate their expectations more clearly. If interns are performing well on-site supervisors may wish to ensure to provide that feedback, while also providing constructive suggestions for continued improved. Second, interns' innate ability to monitor and self-assess their performance, or incorporate feedback may need to be cultivated. This could be an opportunity for educators to incorporate more options for skill development in incorporating feedback. Specifically for internships, developing an opportunity for a metacognitive reflection assignment on improvement midway through the semester could encourage students to meet with supervisors, internalize feedback, implement corrective measures and self-monitor improvement. Third, the qualitative and quantitative data reveals that the deviations between intern and on-site supervisor evaluations may also be a result of students being more critical of their own work or simply thinking about a different set of work duties than their supervisor. Again, clearer communication from on-site supervisor to intern about both expectations and performance may help to solve some of this challenge.

The data presented above are pilot in nature, and the analysis is basic. Although revealing, we believe future work will benefit from at least two developments. First, the collection of more data is necessary. Expanding the data beyond two semesters will yield a larger

sample with greater variation in students and sponsoring organizations. Additionally, the collection of data from other political science internship programs could also likely yield additional information. Second, additional and more sophisticated analyses will provide greater information about the differences – or similarities – between intern and on-site supervisor evaluations.

Together, we believe this work contributes to our understanding in two areas: first, how interns evaluate their performance, and second, how that differs from their supervisors. The more accurately interns evaluate their own performance, the better they will likely perform in their internships, and thus the better their internship experience will be. Learning more about these questions will allow internship program coordinators, faculty, intern supervisors, and on-site supervisors to tailor intern experiences to better enhance the internship experience for all students and sponsoring organizations.

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Appendix

	Supervisor	Student
Table 1. Match and No Match Codes for Activity		
	Supervisor	Student
No Match	"XXX was essentially in charge of running the digital organizing operations (phone and text banking) and she was so proactive in terms of training volunteers, anticipating questions and maintaining clear communication with management."	"When Abigail was going to an event at a mosque in Woodbridge, I volunteered to go with her and help translate if needed. I was able to go with her as the only intern and speak with her constituents and use multilingual skills (Urdu) to speak to voters who didn't speak english well. I then stayed after Abigail and her Political Director had to leave, and I passed around voter info and helped voters find their polling locations."
Match	"Among her many duties, one of XXX's projects was to help manage Amtrak's relationship with the bike advocacy community through our work with the "Bike Task Force." XXX has been responsible for coordination, communication, and updates for the Task Force participants…."	"The Amtrak Bike Task Force. I had to prepare documents and reports for monthly meetings. At monthly meetings, I had to actively take notes and engage with the external bike organizations advocating for advancements in equipment. "

	Student	Intern
Table 2. Example of Match and No Match Code for Improvement		
Matching	"With such a busy schedule we know it can be hard to incorporate an unpaid internship, clearly communicating what takes priority that week should continue to be something XXX works on. "	"I would say do not take on as much throughout the year. I took on a lot of extra circulars that made my time very limited and completing deadlines very difficult. it got to a point where I was focused too much on just completing a task rather than learning from it. "
Not Matching: Different Topics	"I recommend that XXX continue to reach out to senior team members to continue to build his professional network. During his internship Gaetano connected with a former Ambassador to learn about workforce development policy. In his future internships, I recommend that he try to talk to all senior team members."	"Plan out my time better."

Not Matching: Student Harsher than Supervisor	"A+++++"	"If I were to intern on the hill again, I would take more initiatives in asking for projects and coffee dates. This semester, I was more focused on producing solid work and was a little scared to make those connections. "