**Final Paper: Internship Reflection**

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**Introduction**

This summer, I had the opportunity to intern with Henrico County Public Schools in the Student Support and Wellness Department. This internship allowed me to apply concepts from my sociology and psychology coursework to real-world settings, particularly those related to student mental health, trauma, family systems, and community-based support. The internship directly tied to my academic focus in sociology by involving work that addressed social inequalities, trauma-informed practices, and the role of institutional systems in student development. It also allowed me to apply the sociological imagination to better understand how students’ individual challenges are often shaped by broader societal structures and issues.
**Description of Responsibilities**

One of my primary roles during this internship was supporting the Douglas Freeman High School counseling office through a wide variety of organizational and clerical tasks. I worked to alphabetize and file student records, transition files for graduating seniors, and prepare folders for incoming freshmen. These tasks, while detail-oriented and administrative, taught me the value of efficient information management in a school setting, especially when counselors rely on accurate documentation to support students in moments of need.

In addition to filing, I contributed significantly to organizing and furnishing The Oak, which is a new mental health clinic designed to serve the needs of students in the county. I helped deliver supplies, unboxed furniture and materials, and created systems for organizing the space. When my supervisor had to step away unexpectedly, I took initiative to lead the setup of the space, ensuring that everything was put together in time for its use. It was a rewarding experience that tested my independence, leadership, and problem-solving abilities, all in a real-time work environment.

Beyond daily logistical tasks, I also participated in professional development and training sessions. I completed a Youth Mental Health First Aid certification course, attended trauma-informed care trainings, and observed professional learning sessions offered by Henrico County to staff. These trainings deepened my understanding of how trauma, mental health issues, and environmental stressors can affect youths development. They also introduced me to frameworks and vocabulary that school systems use when discussing behavior, intervention, and student support.

As the summer progressed, I was also given the opportunity to assist with planning and organizing a countywide educator event. One of my assignments involved updating and reviewing SCHED, an online platform used to manage event sessions, room numbers, presenter details, and descriptions. I helped identify inconsistencies, made edits, and created agenda cards for each room using Canva. This gave me hands-on experience in managing logistics for large-scale programming and helped sharpen my attention to detail, particularly in how information is communicated to large audiences.

I also took part in projects such as brainstorming bulletin board ideas focused on student mental health and self-worth (such as a “You Matter Because…” board), organizing grief kits materials, and inventorying supplies for the school counselors in the county. These projects allowed me to combine creativity and empathy which are two qualities I believe are essential in both sociology and education.

**Skills Learned**

This internship allowed me to grow both professionally and personally. While interning I developed several important skills, many of which are transferable across careers in education and school counseling.

Communication and Collaboration

Working within Central Office and across school sites required clear, professional communication. Whether I was speaking with supervisors, meeting new people within the county, or assisting Central Office Staff, I learned how to express ideas confidently and respond to feedback constructively. I also observed the ways effective communication is key in trauma-informed work and education as a whole.

Organization and Time Management

From filing large volumes of student records to managing event schedules, I learned how to prioritize tasks, stay organized under pressure, and handle multiple responsibilities effectively. I used Google Sheets to keep detailed lists and track supplies, which helped ease my workflow. Completing complex transitions of student records gave me valuable insight into how strong organizational systems contribute to overall efficiency within a school setting.

Initiative and Leadership

The moment I was left in charge of setting up The Oak reinforced my ability to take initiative when necessary. I stepped into a leadership role, delegated tasks where needed, and ensured the project was completed. That experience was a reminder that even as an intern, my contributions mattered and that I could be trusted with meaningful responsibility.

Trauma-Informed Practice and Mental Health Awareness

Participating in youth mental health and trauma-informed trainings was one of the most impactful parts of my internship. I gained knowledge of how trauma affects brain development, behavior, and academic performance. After attending these sessions I now feel more confident identifying signs of distress and understanding the appropriate steps to take in offering support or referring someone to professional help within Henrico County Public Schools and in my personal life.

Attention to Detail

Helping organize a countywide professional development event allowed me to understand the behind-the-scenes work of large-scale educational gatherings. It required an eye for consistency and clarity which are skills that are crucial in both logistics and advocacy work.

**Key Takeaways**

Throughout my internship, I was able to apply concepts from my sociology courses in meaningful ways. One key idea I saw in action was the sociological imagination. In many of the student stories I encountered indirectly, whether through classmates sharing their personal experience with students, trauma cases, or academic performance concerns, I was reminded that individual experiences are often shaped by broader social forces. Family instability, economic hardship, systemic racism, and community violence were all social realities that impacted students’ ability to focus, learn, or feel safe at school.

I also observed the significance of social institutions, particularly the education system, as an agent of socialization. Schools play a vital role not only in academic instruction, but also in the emotional, mental, and behavioral development of children. My work within this internship emphasized how counselors serve as critical links between the school and other institutions, such as families, mental health providers, and social services.

Additionally, I encountered the concept of roles and status in action. Teachers and counselors often juggle multiple demands such as academic expectations, emotional support, family communication, and disciplinary actions while still trying to meet the unique needs of each student. Seeing how the system tries to balance these conflicting expectations gave me a better understanding of the stress placed on educators and how systemic support is necessary for success in their roles as well.

**Conclusion**

This internship has been one of the most formative experiences in my academic and professional journey. It strengthened my understanding of school systems, deepened my knowledge of trauma-informed care, and gave me the confidence to take initiative in fast-paced, high-impact environments. More importantly, it reminded me why I chose sociology as my major. Sociology has made me better understand the world, challenge inequality, and create spaces where people, especially youth, an thrive. I am grateful for this experience and excited to bring these lessons with me into my future career in student support or school counseling.