

Jackson, R., & Jackson, M. (2009). Students assessment of a semidirected internship program. *Journal of Geography*, 108(2), 57-67.

Journal Article Evaluation

The article for review is *Students Assessment of a Semidirected Internship Program* (Jackson & Jackson, 2009). It was published in the *Journal of Geography* and presents the results of surveys conducted at Brigham Young University regarding students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the less traditional internship program they participated in. Although the article is well-written and pertinent to the subject of geography, some of the authors' interpretations of the responses may be one-sided and prompt follow-up questions.

The authors begin the article by providing background information as to how this semidirected program differs from other internship programs and why they chose to focus on their chosen topic. The program relies on the geography department faculty to grade assignments and determine whether the students receive academic credit. However, there are no programmatic links between the department and the internship providers, and each student is responsible for finding and making his own internship arrangements. The authors continue and explain that the purpose of their study is to focus on students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the semidirected program, in contrast to existing geography-focused internship studies, most of which present faculty members' perspectives (Jackson & Jackson, 2009, pp 57-58). Because this internship program is semidirected and has less faculty involvement, it is logical that the students' opinions would be appreciated as central to the program.

The researchers described the relevant details of their study, including the timeframe, population, and setting in their Data Collection section. The students were all who completed internships in the Brigham Young University geography department over a five-year period

(Jackson & Jackson, 2009). Although the article states the approximate number of students in a graduating class and the approximate percentage of students to complete the internship, they do not mention the actual number of participants in the study. Given their approximations, there should have been about 100 students, and I am curious as to why it is not anywhere in the article. Through the rest of the article, they mention specific figures, but one does not know if when they say, “nine students” (Jackson & Jackson, 2009, p.58), it is nine out of 85, nine out of 100, or nine out of 125. With such a small sample, it would be easier for the reader to do his own analysis of the data, or a replication of the study, knowing the exact amount of participants.

The presentation of internship characteristics, survey questions, areas of focus, and open-ended responses are done by groupings and shown in easy-to-read graphs and tables within the article. The text of the article gives more detail about each table and graph for readers and refers to several at the same time in order to explain a suggested finding. The majority of the interpretations made sense and followed logically the evidence referenced, but there were a few exceptions. For example,

... “strongly agree” drops below 35 percent, suggesting that mentors/supervisors did more poorly in explaining the “why” of a project than “what” was required. This may reflect the fact that the supervisor/mentor as a professional in the area of the internship understood why the project/task was being done, but the intern lacked such insight (Jackson & Jackson, 2009, pp 61).

The authors do not present the possibility the supervisor/mentor might have had poor communication skills, and the student might have otherwise understood the reasoning.

Another such instance was in the section discussing students' responses to the open-ended question requesting suggestions for improvements to the experience (Jackson & Jackson, 2009).

Nine students said that they would improve the internship by including more time on the job. Most of those nine students (67 percent) also indicated professional work as their main duty, suggesting that actually using their training was exciting and they wanted even more to do so (Jackson & Jackson, 2009, p.65).

As one who has worked in a professional internship environment, I would offer the interpretation that the students might not have had enough time to complete the tasks they were given and disliked having to leave projects unfinished. Perhaps the excitement and desire for more opportunities followed from that, but without more information, it should not automatically be assumed that is the students' reasoning. We do not know any definitive answers, but the authors' reflections on the responses do not appear strongly supported.

The conclusion of the article provides recommendations for improving communication between students and their supervisor/mentors and for reducing the amount of secretarial work given to the interns. Based on the results the authors present from their study, the conclusions follow logically. However, the results should be analyzed more thoroughly or presented in contrast with other possible interpretations.

Though this article has the potential to be improved, it could still prove useful to someone doing assessment in higher education. The qualitative data is presented and referenced well. Information is often difficult to aggregate and show in a format simple enough to communicate the main point but still show the necessary detail used to justify that point. The article is not overpowered by the amount of tables and graphs, nor does it have extra charts that are not

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mentioned in or irrelevant to the text. Additionally, the focus areas and open-ended response groupings provided excellent section breaks within the text discussion.