# Developing Social Jus<mark>tice</mark> Leaders and Advocates through Internships for Doctoral Students

Leadership and advocacy continue to be a pillar of the counselor education doctoral standards in the 2024 CACREP Standards. By utilizing an internship model to scaffold doctoral student leadership and advocacy development, counselor educators can impact the pipeline of professional leaders. In this teaching brief, we outline the integration of a leadership and advocacy internship as part of a doctoral program internship course. We provide three real-life examples of leadership and advocacy internships. Finally, we discuss the impact a leadership and advocacy internship had on our own professional development, identity development, and self-efficacy.

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### Introduction

Leadership and advocacy (L&A) are intertwined, central tenets of the counseling profession represented in both ethical mandates and accreditation standards (ACA, 2014, 2018; CACREP, 2024; Kaplan & Gladding, 2011). Further, counselors and counselor educators are charged with using leadership opportunities to promote social justice advocacy across a variety of levels ranging from individual level change to systems level change (ACA, 2014, 2018; Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022). As a pillar of counselor education, L&A must be adequately addressed in doctoral training to ensure continued professional development in the ability to enact both in professional contexts (Barrio Minton & Watcher Morris, 2022).

The 2024 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards require that doctoral programs address five core areas, one of which is L&A. Within this area, students must learn about theories and models of L&A, how to lead and advocate in counselor education (CE), and how to promote ethical and culturally sensitive L&A (CACREP, 2024). However, a recent scoping review found only three articles on training doctoral students in L&A, suggesting that there is limited available information on training best practices in this area (Litherland & Schulthes, 2020). Counselor educators and students also note the lack of training in L&A, suggesting that current training may be inadequate to prepare counselor educators to enact their role as leaders and advocates (McKibbin, 2016; Storlie et al., 2015). Though limited research is available, researchers found that students who engaged in leadership experiences and smaller-scale leadership while in their programs believed these experiences supported their professional identity development, sustainability of involvement in L&A, future involvement in larger-scale leadership, with real-world leadership experiences being particularly beneficial (Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Speciale & Goodrich, 2020). When considering professional development, social cognitive career theory (SCCT) frames that modeling, mentorship, and direct experience can support self-efficacy and outcome expectation which are major drivers in development and action (Lent & Brown, 2013). Supervised experiences can accomplish SCCT's suggested need through a structured mentoring relationship where an experienced counselor educator supports positive learning experiences and serves as a model for the student. Additionally, training related to social justice advocacy is, in part, a training of professional identity (Brat et al., 2016; Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022). To ensure adequate support during this development, doctoral students must process the experiences of grappling with professional identity development and working towards integration through faculty supervision or other mentorship relationships (Dollarhide et al., 2013). Faculty supervision in this process will also aid in skill development, cognitive complexity, and fidelity in implementation (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019; Glosoff & Druham, 2010; Lent & Brown, 2013), especially when trying to support the understanding that social justice work can take many forms (Fickling & González, 2016; Peters & Luke, 2021). Additionally, membership in Chi Sigma lota currently provides the bulk of leadership experiences of doctoral students; however, these opportunities might limit the impact of social justice advocacy and

minimize the connection of professional counseling to community needs (Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Woo et al., 2016).

To address the lack of training and the importance of providing scaffolded leadership experiences to support student development, we propose embedding a dedicated doctoral level leadership and advocacy internship within internship courses. Using an internship model will enable students to gain real-world leadership and advocacy experience with the support of mentorship and supervision from faculty. Further, it will provide students will the opportunity to practice transferring counseling skills to leadership skills (Lockard III et al., 2014) while also allowing space to process barriers to involvement in L&A such as micropolitics, self-efficacy, time, lack of awareness, and imposter syndrome (Oehrtman & Dollarhide, 2021; Speciale & Goodrich, 2020; Toomey & Storlie, 2016). Finally, these tailored experiences will also enable doctoral students to consider connections to the needs of their community and receive feedback related to advocacy efforts.

#### POSITIONALITY

The first three authors of this brief are counselor educators who experienced a L&A internship as part of their doctoral studies under the supervision of Melinda M. Gibbons, the fourth author, a faculty doctoral coordinator, and internship supervisor. The proposed teaching innovation has informed our collective teaching praxis across five different institutions, including how we integrate L&A training for master's and doctoral students. Therefore, we write from the perspective of counselor educators reflecting on their experiences implementing and experiencing a L&A as an instructional strategy. The fourth author, a supervisor for the L&A internship, writes from her perspective as a developer and instructor of this activity.

A formalized L&A internship enables doctoral students to move beyond a theoretical application of leadership to a concrete experimentation with L&A theory and the translation of counseling skills into leadership skills. By providing a structured experience in which to develop as leaders and advocates, doctoral students receive the scaffolding needed to move from potential leaders to self-efficacious leaders through intentional supervision, examination of pertinent literature, and integration into professional identity. The authors who engaged in this learning experience, each saw increased efficacy and confidence as leaders and advocates, reflected in their ability to provide mentorship in their current roles, involvement in ongoing L&A efforts, and meaningful integration into their professional identity. They largely credit this internship experience for this growth. They engaged in diverse opportunities, mirroring the call for action in the current literature for the development of leaders and advocates who are able to engage in social justice initiatives across program, profession, and community levels. With this experience, they were prepared to engage in L&A in their professional roles as CE, enabling them to not only speak to L&A experiences during the job search process but also to begin providing mentorship to both master's and doctoral students as they continued to engage in ongoing L&A endeavors. By utilizing an internship model to support this professional identity development, structured academic supervision ideally transitions to mentorship relationships in future and ongoing leadership development.

# **Description of Teaching Innovation**/ **Instructional Strategy**

The teaching innovation is to embed a L&A internship option within the internship courses for doctoral students. The integration of L&A internships may provide an opportunity to meet the CACREP standards of intentional training in L&A and bridge the gap of theory and practice. In this way, students who are pre-exposed to leadership theory have an opportunity to explore various theories for 'fit' until they find the one that most aligns with them. Students are encouraged to find a theory that aligns with their own professional and personal values and identities. Through supervision, the supervisor continually works to integrate theory throughout planning, implementation, and evaluations. Asking questions such as: *How does this align with your values as a professional counselor and counselor educator? Where have you seen yourself as a leader or advocate in other settings? How does x align with your professional values, how does it misalign?* 

In addition to the integration of theory, there is a clear link between professional identity development and leadership identity development (Dollarhide et al, 2013; Gibson, 2016; Luke & Goodrich, 2010; Speciale & Goodrich, 2020). Weekly engagement with the L&A internship is critical to ensure momentum and consistency in leadership and provides an intentional space to process the struggles that are inherent in leadership within any organization (Speciale & Goodman, 2020). Through the supervisor's continued feedback, evaluation, and validation, doctoral students build on their self-efficacy, impacting their willingness to engage in L&A after graduation. The supervision provided through these internships may also transition into mentorship relationships after graduation. Mentorship post-graduation may enhance students' leadership, self-efficacy, and willingness to see L&A through the long-term. Mentorship may also facilitate students' adaptability while navigating micropolitics (Oerhtman & Dollarhide, 2021, 2022). With this understanding, the fourth author discusses how program faculty recognized a need for deliberate practice with L&A, then we outline the logistics of a L&A internship at one institution while bearing in mind implementation at other institutions will depend on the community, program, student needs, and interest. Finally, we share three real-life case examples with reflections of the impact of a L&A internship as an instructional strategy.

Several years ago, in a semi-annual systematic review of programs, the fourth authors' program faculty identified L&A preparation as needing improvement within their doctoral student development. To address this concern, the program increased the course time allotted to L&A topics in one of the orientation courses but recognized the need to offer an experiential opportunity as well. The program's internship course is unique in that it separates internship experiences into six, one-credit units that are completed over several semesters. To navigate the five pillars of counselor education and the developmental needs of students, which may vary based on professional experiences (e.g., a student who has convectively completed all higher education; a student who has over a decade of professional experience), students

are required to complete across the six internship experiences, two in supervision, two in teaching, one in L&A or counseling, and one based on students' preference. The L&A internship would be an optional internship for interested students, designed to engage students in L&A activities conducted by CE, such as community leadership, program planning and development, accreditation, social justice advocacy, and program evaluation.

Students are permitted to propose their own L&A project by submitting a brief literature review, needs assessment, and semester-long plan, or they can participate in a program-sponsored project such as CACREP accreditation oversight, American Counseling Association (ACA) committee work with a faculty member, or admissions recruitment. A faculty member serves as site supervisor and meets weekly with the student for supervision. Supervision focuses on project development and activities while also helping the student develop their L&A theoretical orientation and overall skills. L&A interns also participate in regular group supervision.

Unique components of this internship include the opportunity to engage in supervised L&A activities and the intentional focus on L&A identity development. These activities help supplement the course topics of L&A theory and models covered in the orientation course. L&A interns gain concrete experience where they can 'try on' models of leadership and experience how L&A roles occur in CE. Just as CE programs require practical and engaged experiences for supervision, teaching, and clinical work, L&A internships provide concrete experiences for this important pillar of the counseling profession.

Since its inception, the L&A internship has been revised based on student and faculty experiences. The requirement of a formal application that includes a literature review and needs assessment helped focus student-developed projects. Identifying ongoing L&A program activities also helped create a list of existing internship experiences that would directly benefit the program. For example, the new *2024 CACREP Standards* required revision of student learning outcomes, key performance indicators, and how these are measured over time. L&A interns have been integral to successfully completing this task. Lastly, more intentional program consideration of social justice and diversity/equity has encouraged L&A projects that integrate these topics. In all, the L&A internship successfully offers a supervised experience to develop the skills for effective L&A.

#### THE DETAILS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The internships described here consisted of 100 hours (1 credit hour) in one semester, or some extended into two 100-hour internships in both fall and spring semesters. Students were required to create a pre-proposal the semester before completing the internship and secure a faculty member who agreed to function as the site supervisor. The proposal consisted of a needs assessment (1-2 paragraphs), a brief literature review (500 words maximum), tentative steps, and connections to L&A (1 paragraph). Students who completed a community-based internship must also secure a community-based site supervisor, to ensure community stakeholder involvement. An internship and supervision contract included the (a) needs assessment from the pre-proposal, (b) scholarship, (c) project creation, (d) transition plan to ensure support and

continuity after the student finishes their requirement, and (e) evaluation. Faculty, students, and site supervisors signed the contract. The students presented their internship reflections and experiences twice each semester, ideally at the beginning and end of the semester. At every group supervision meeting, students engaged in an open dialogue where they shared questions or celebrations about their current internship processes.

#### INTERNSHIP EXAMPLES

The fourth author has been the supervisor for multiple L&A internships, she has been consistently impressed by the effort and thoughtfulness that doctoral students put into this process. She has supervised students engaging in a variety of efforts, including those supporting community mental health services, key performance indicator (KPI) development for CACREP compliance, and cultural identity inclusion within the counseling program. Regardless of the project focus, he fourth author strives for a combination of concrete activity and broader L&A reflection in each weekly meeting. She tries to spend some time facilitating macro-advocacy and leadership skills by assisting with timeline planning and task development and completion. The remaining weekly time is spent helping students process their leadership and advocacy experiences, asking questions such as: How does your leadership theory inform your choices? How does your approach connect to your values as a professional counselor and counselor educator? What type of leader and advocate do you want to be and how might this be demonstrated in future CE activities? Most students research leadership theories as part of their internship experience. Therefore, supervisors work with the students, to consider how their theory presents in their current experience as well as how it might impact future L&A activities.

The fourth author also intentionally promotes reflection on the intersection of L&A,social justice, and multiculturalism. As she sees it, L&A must be situated within the context of those being served and this requires attention to understanding privilege, equity, and access. Sometimes, students, with their goal of helping others, may engage in savior-like activities or neglect to consider the unique needs and strengths of others. As the L&A internship has been developed with colleagues, the group has sought to highlight this intersectionality so students would develop as social justice-centered leaders and advocates and understand how that relates to the ways in which they lead and advocate. It is not enough to simply develop and implement a project; students must also consider whether the project actually serves the community, demonstrates ethical practices, and builds on existing strengths of the community.

As a summative activity, the students complete a case presentation with six required components. (1) Students must present and discuss their leadership philosophy grounded in a leadership theory that was explored throughout the semester with faculty supervision and support. The students are encouraged to utilize theory to guide decisions throughout the internship process. (2) Students provide a background of their internship site and relevant stakeholders. (3) Students outline their projected outcomes and goals for the internship. (4) Students outline a spectrum of activities that need to be done to meet the projected outcomes. (5) Students share ethical, legal, and cultural considerations relevant to the internship. (6)

In class presentation format, the students share their current reflections on the internship and their own development as leaders and advocates. The presentations allow for peers to offer feedback on the specific L&A activities as well as challenge interns to consider how to improve on and learn from their experiences. The instructor also provides constructive feedback and future learning strategies. Three real-life examples are illustrated below to show how various internships can specifically target mentorship, self-efficacy, theory, and professional identity development.

#### **Community-based internship**

The first author (she/ella) completed a community-based L&A internship and leveraged her previous community involvement. She became aware of the community's need for a bilingual mental health resource guide while volunteering with the organization. During her internship, the executive director functioned as her site supervisor. When first exposed to servant-leadership and leadership theories in CE course work, the first author did not feel connected to any models. Serendipitously, the site supervisor was keen on Latino leadership theory and mentored the student in finding a leadership theory that matched her culture and values. The student was able to explore leadership theory and ethical decision making with the support of the faculty supervisor.

#### **CACREP** Reaccreditation Internship

The second author (he/him) completed a CE program-based L&A internship through the CACREP reaccreditation cycle. CACREP reaccreditation required the development and organization of supporting materials and logistic work for the actual site visit. In alignment with ethical and legal requirements (e.g., Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 1974) the faculty and author coordinated the student's access to records given his role in the program. The CACREP liaison and site supervisor supported the author's familiarization with the work that had been completed for the self-study and discussed areas that needed further development and the aspects of the site visit that the author could coordinate (e.g., organizing interviews, developing schedules, and retrieving relevant resources when requested). This author desired to understand the accreditation process further while developing his leadership theory.

The second author was interested in exploring concepts of servant leadership theory often written about in CE literature and transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006). As a servant leader, he found congruence in embracing a willingness to engage in all levels of the advocacy process. As a transformational leader, he found congruence in embracing a critical lens to systems and policies to evaluate for possible influences of continued marginalization and oppression (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By marrying these, he worked to listen and understand the historical context of why things have been done and a willingness to examine for a means that may improve equity. He continues to use these experiences and conceptualization in a variety of other L&A tasks.

#### **Counselors For Inclusion (CoFI)**

The third author (she/her) completed a CE program-based L&A internship through involvement with the organization Counselors for Inclusion (CoFI). CoFI was an advisory board and collaboration between faculty and students that sought to increase multicultural awareness and competence among students and support for diverse students. Through this collaborative process, members of CoFI took the lead in implementing relevant curricular changes, integrating student feedback, designing and providing a yearly training related to multicultural competence, and conducting regular climate assessments. During the course of this L&A internship, the author took on additional responsibilities within CoFI, facilitated board meetings, evaluated and adapted operations and purpose. Through this process, the author sought to apply transformational leadership theory. Through the ongoing application of theory and supervision, the author found that transformational leadership theory provided a strong foundation for their leadership approach but did not account for aspects such as identity and diversity, leading the author to also integrate an identity-specific leadership theory which more fully captured the needs and experiences. Supervision in this context allowed an opportunity to process the meaning of being a leader and advocate who holds minoritized identities in a safe space and make changes to the approach as needed.

# **Evaluation of Effectiveness of Teaching Innovation/Instructional Strategy**

As counselor educators who oversaw and had these formative experiences described here, we share first-hand experience of the effectiveness of this teaching innovation. Each of the first three authors felt that the direct mentoring of the site supervisor as well as the feedback and support from group supervision, increased their self-efficacy in navigating embodying social justice leaders and advocates. Additionally, we are all current counselor educators working with master's and doctoral students, we are keenly aware of how these experiences have informed our teaching praxis. Doctoral students enter programs with varying degrees of L&A experience, and therefore all assessments should be done through a developmental perspective (Ramírez Stege et al., 2017). As faculty members implementing such a teaching innovation, it is critical to be aware of power differentials in the group supervision class to ensure students are supported and challenged in their development as leaders and advocates. This might necessitate that supervising faculty members provide more critical feedback to ensure growth and not stagnation in development. Additionally, when considering the impact of community-based internships, various dual relationships might come into play during group supervision, and it can be hard to anticipate the various prior relationships that exist outside of the classroom, particularly in more rural areas and with minoritized communities. Therefore, the supervising faculty must be open and willing to broach topics of cultural diversity throughout the entire internship process.

#### ASSESSMENT TOOLS/METHODS USED IN TEACHING INNOVATION/ INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY TO ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING

Concrete forms of assessment included documentation of work time in internship time logs/ records and midterm and final written evaluations from the site supervisor on standardized forms provided in the program's internship handbook. In addition, students' perceptions of personal and project development were assessed using two reflection papers (i.e., initial selfassessment and summative self-assessment) and two formal internship group presentations about the project. The second formal internship group presentation also required a written component about the project and its development. Students were expected to identify and collect data from the experience, when possible and appropriate. As a summative evaluation tool, the students completed a self-reflection paper. The students wrote a five-to-seven page self-reflection paper, with the following headings: (a) reflect on your growth, (b) self-efficacy, (c) points of learning and missed opportunities, (d) how has this experienced changed your perception of leadership and advocacy? and (e) what major take-aways will you use in your future work as a counselor educator with master's and/or doctoral students? Finally, students' development was assessed through supervisor observations and/or reports of the effectiveness of the intern's work and professionalism, and regular verbal feedback. Site supervisor observations focused on effectiveness and professional dispositions as outlined by CACREP and created by the CE program (Spurgeon et al, 2012).

While not implemented in our experiences, we have considered utilizing a self-assessment tool to encourage student reflection such as the *Advocacy Competencies Self-Assessment Scale* (Ratts & Ford, 2010). The scale asks people to rate statements and scores cross-listed to areas of advocacy competency. This may help both the doctoral student and their faculty supervisor identify areas of development for the student to lean into. The downside to a scale such as this is the caution of comparison or self-belief that that a student has met competency and further work is not needed.

## Implications

While this intervention aligns with the 2024 CACREP Standards and we noted a strong impact on their professional identity development, social justice advocacy identity development, and leadership self-efficacy, the long-term impacts of this intervention are not yet known, and the intervention should be implemented with additional students and in varying contexts to better understand its impact. Additionally, this intervention only applied to doctoral students, and a developmentally-appropriate implementation may also be explored for master's students in order to further build social justice advocacy. Another limitation is the level of investment required, as programs may not have additional capacity for faculty to provide leadership/ advocacy specific supervision. Future research may seek to better understand the impact of a formalized internship experience on professional identity development and leadership/ advocacy self-efficacy. Additionally, researchers may explore the long-term impact on professionals who engaged in this intervention to determine efficacy across one's career as well as exploring the potential impact on professional and community advocacy efforts by conducting community-engaged research (Barrio Minton et al., 2021). For example, researchers may examine both the intern's self-efficacy prior to and after the completion of the internship experience, combined with an examination of the impact of the advocacy efforts on community partners. Using this evaluative approach may allow researchers to better understand both the intrinsic and community-based impact of this practice. Through this line of research, educators will then be able to adapt this internship to be more impactful in terms of professional identity development for the intern and having needs met by the community partners.

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