Partner's Agencies' Expectations and Challenges on Public Administration Student-Interns: Basis for Internship Program Enhancement

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Abstract – *This study examines the expectations and challenges of partner agencies in the Philippines' Bachelor of Public Administration (BPA) internship program. It evaluates the nature and duration of partnerships, the number of interns, their assigned tasks, and the agencies' expectations. The study identifies challenges faced by these agencies and provides recommendations to improve the internship process. Findings reveal that the program provides significant opportunities for student development, but issues like inefficient coordination, insufficient resource allocation, and limited feedback mechanisms hinder its optimal implementation. The study recommends comprehensive pre-deployment training, structured mentorship programs, digital performance monitoring systems, and enhanced logistical support.*

Keyword – *Internship, Public Administration, Partner Agencies*

INTRODUCTION

Internships are integral to the educational experience of students in Public Administration, bridging academic theory with practical application and equipping students with essential skills. They provide real-world exposure, helping students navigate professional challenges while building competencies (Furco et al., 2010). However, Clark (2023) emphasizes that the success of internships depends heavily on the expectations and challenges faced by partner agencies. In the Philippines, where the demand for skilled public servants is growing, it becomes crucial to assess the state of internship programs in the Bachelor of Public Administration (BPA) framework (Brillantes et al., 2011). This study explores these dynamics, focusing on the alignment between agency expectations and student performance.

Globally, internships are widely recognized for preparing students for the workforce. In the United States, internships are essential to higher education, fostering partnerships between institutions and industries for hands-on professional experience. Canada adopts a similar approach, emphasizing collaboration between students and industries to enhance workforce readiness (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2023; International Exchange of North America, 2024). These structured programs bridge the academic-to-employment

transition, benefiting students with real-world exposure and organizations with fresh perspectives. The Philippines mirrors these practices through Commission on Higher Education (CHED) policies, such as CMO No. 104 (2017), which promote collaboration between educational institutions and public sector agencies to strengthen experiential learning opportunities.

Despite established frameworks, Philippine BPA internship programs often fall short of meeting partner agency expectations (Clark et al., 2009). This study specifically examines the experiences of six public administration agencies, including the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office, the Philippine Commission on Women, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-CAR, among others. These agencies represent diverse facets of public administration and offer valuable insights into the operational needs and challenges they face, such as the integration of interns, performance monitoring, and evaluation processes. The findings aim to address discrepancies and realign internship programs to better meet agency and student needs (Brillantes et al., 2011).

By analyzing the expectations and challenges of partner agencies, this research aims to refine BPA internship programs to enhance mutual benefits. Educational institutions can tailor programs to equip

students with the competencies, skills, and behaviors required in public service. Moreover, detailed recommendations from partner agencies regarding the internship process—from pre-deployment to post-internship evaluation—will inform an actionable framework to improve the overall experience. This study aspires to strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of BPA internships, producing public administration graduates well-prepared to serve their communities while meeting the evolving demands of public sector employers.

Generally, this study aimed to determine the status of BPA internship program partnership with agencies in terms of number of years of partnership, number of student-interns deployed, key requirement for student-interns, nature of work assignment provided to student-interns, and the number of student-interns employed; the expectations of the partner agencies to the BPA student-interns in terms of knowledge, competencies and skills, and behavior; the challenges experienced by partner agencies in the BPA Internship Program; the recommendations of the partner agencies for the improvement of the BPA internship program in terms of pre-deployment, internship proper, and post-internship; and the action plan that could be proposed to enhance the implementation of BPA Internship Program.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing a case study approach to gain in-depth insights into the agencies' perspectives. By focusing on six key partner agencies, this research seeks to understand the dynamics of the BPA internship program, evaluating both its effectiveness and areas for potential improvement.

The participants of this study consisted of key personnel from six government agencies that partnered with the Bachelor of Public Administration (BPA) internship program. These agencies included the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO) – National Office, Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) – National Office, Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) – Regional Office, Civil Service Commission (CSC) – Regional Office, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) – Provincial Office, and the Provincial

Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO)– Provincial Office.

The study employed purposive sampling to select partner agencies that accepted BPA student-interns. This approach was designed to choose agencies dedicated to the BPA internship program, ensuring that the chosen agencies possessed substantial experience and deep insights into the program. Participants in this study included individuals directly involved in supervising or coordinating BPA interns, such as coordinators, HR or administrative heads, and supervisors who were available on the scheduled interview day. Their perspectives were essential for evaluating the program's effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Status of the BPA Internship Program Partnership

STATUS OF THE BPA INTERNSHIP PROGRAM PARTNERSHIP	
Number of Years of Partnership	National Offices: • PVAO 2 Years • PCW 2 Years Regional Offices: • DENR 2 Years • CSC 3 Years National Offices: • PDRRMO 5 Years • DILG 3 Years
Number of Student-Intern Deployed	National Offices: STABLE Regional Offices: STABLE Provincial Offices: INCREASING
Agency Requirements for Student-Intern	Key Requirements for Student Interns. Pre-Deployment phase: • Before Enrollment • Before and Upon Deployment During the Internship After the internship
Nature of Work Assignment Provided to Student-Intern	• Policy Research • Administrative tasks • Public Service-Related Projects • Technical Writing • Infographic Design • Monitoring System • Event Management
Number of Student-Intern Employed	NATIONAL OFFICE: 2024 4 Student-Intern REGIONAL OFFICE: 2019 1 Student-Intern PROVINCIAL OFFICE: 2024 3 Student-intern

The Bachelor of Public Administration (BPA) Internship Program has fostered partnerships with various government agencies across national, regional, and provincial levels, with durations ranging from two to five years. National offices, such as the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO) and the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), maintain partnerships of two years, reflecting relatively recent collaborations. Regional offices, including the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Civil Service Commission (CSC), have partnerships spanning two and three years, respectively, emphasizing a slightly more established connection. The Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO) has the most extensive partnership, lasting five years, followed by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) at three years, highlighting the stronger engagement of provincial agencies in the internship program.

The number of student interns deployed has remained stable at national and regional levels, indicating consistency in their internship programs. However, the increasing number of interns at provincial offices suggests expanding opportunities and an enhanced capacity to accommodate more students. This trend aligns with the greater operational needs and responsibilities of provincial agencies, such as the PDRRMO and DILG, which rely heavily on interns to supplement their workforce. The stable deployment at national and regional offices may indicate well-established processes and an optimal balance between available tasks and the number of interns. This dynamic reflects the varying capacity and needs of partner agencies across different levels of governance.

Agency requirements for student interns follow a structured framework divided into three phases: pre-deployment, during the internship, and post-internship. The pre-deployment phase includes essential steps like enrollment verification, submission of documents, and pre-OJT seminars to prepare students for their roles. During the internship, interns are required to maintain daily time records, submit progress reports, and engage in ongoing assessments. The post-internship phase focuses on reflective evaluations, including narrative reports and seminars, ensuring interns can consolidate their learning experiences. These comprehensive requirements aim to maintain professionalism and accountability while bridging academic learning and practical application.

The nature of work assignments for student interns reflects a broad spectrum of tasks, including policy research, administrative duties, and public service-related projects. These roles are designed to provide interns with practical exposure to essential skills like technical writing, monitoring systems, and event management, equipping them with competencies relevant to public administration. The program's success is underscored by the employment of eight former interns in partner agencies across national, regional, and provincial offices, demonstrating the value of the internship experience in building career pathways. Such outcomes highlight the program's effectiveness in preparing interns for future roles in public service while addressing the operational needs of partner agencies.Table 2. Expectation of Partner Agencies for BPA Student-Intern

Table 2. Expectations of the Partner Agencies to the BPA student-interns

Variables	Key points
Knowledge	-Agencies assess interns' initial knowledge through informal discussions but advocate for structured evaluations. Gaps include formal writing, communication, interpersonal skills, and familiarity with advanced tools like AI and graphic design software. -Balancing theoretical knowledge with practical application is emphasized for effective public sector roles.
Competencies and Skills	-Core skills include technical writing, digital literacy, and customer service. Tasks such as research, planning, and strategic communication are aligned with academic training. -Development programs include life skills training (e.g., CPR) and technical training on emerging technologies.
Behavior	-Positive behaviors (respect, punctuality, professionalism) enhance team morale and productivity, while negative behaviors (lateness, miscommunication, resistance to learning) disrupt workflow. -Agencies address these issues through orientation and conflict resolution.

Partner agencies place significant importance on the knowledge base of Bachelor of Public Administration (BPA) student-interns, emphasizing the need for a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application. While initial knowledge is informally assessed through discussions, agencies

advocate for more structured evaluations to pinpoint areas for improvement. Common gaps include formal writing, effective communication, and interpersonal skills, which are crucial in public administration roles. Additionally, familiarity with advanced tools such as artificial intelligence and graphic design software is increasingly valued, highlighting the evolving demands of the public sector workplace.

Competencies and skills are another critical focus, with agencies expecting interns to demonstrate proficiency in technical writing, digital literacy, and customer service. Tasks such as research, planning, and strategic communication align closely with their academic training, ensuring relevance and practical application. To further enhance these competencies, agencies often provide development programs, including life skills training such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and technical workshops on emerging technologies. These initiatives not only equip interns with essential skills but also prepare them to adapt to the dynamic needs of public sector roles.

Behavior plays a pivotal role in the success of internships, as it directly affects team dynamics and productivity. Positive behaviors, such as respect, punctuality, and professionalism, contribute to a harmonious workplace and enhance overall morale. Conversely, negative behaviors like lateness, miscommunication, and resistance to learning can disrupt workflows and hinder progress. Agencies address these challenges through comprehensive orientations that establish clear expectations and guidelines for conduct, as well as conflict resolution strategies to address issues that arise during the internship.

By focusing on knowledge, skills, and behavior, partner agencies create an environment conducive to both learning and productivity. Structured assessments, targeted training, and behavior management strategies ensure that interns not only meet the expectations of their roles but also grow into capable professionals. This holistic approach underscores the internship program's commitment to bridging academic preparation with the practical demands of public administration, ultimately benefiting both interns and the agencies they serve.

Table 3. Challenges Experienced by Partner Agencies

Theme	Key points
Scheduling and Coordination Challenges	-Inconsistent start dates and delays disrupt agency operations, requiring frequent rescheduling. -PDRRMO face difficulties in coordinating inter-departmental schedules and managing multi-channel communication, causing procedural delays.
Administrative and Logistical Challenges	-Lengthy MOA approval processes, as highlighted by PVAO, delay intern onboarding. Agencies lack logistical resources such as laptops, adding operational strain. -These delays and equipment shortages hinder productivity and the overall internship experience.
Resource and Equipment Constraints	-Lack access to essential tools like laptops, affecting productivity and task completion. -Budget constraints prevent agencies from providing sufficient resources, leading to shared or outdated equipment. This diminishes the learning experience and slows task performance.
Limited Feedback Session	-Agencies like DILG and DENR emphasize the importance of mid-internship feedback sessions for fostering continuous learning and professional growth.

Scheduling and coordination challenges are prominent issues affecting the internship program's efficiency. Inconsistent start dates and procedural delays disrupt agency workflows, often necessitating frequent rescheduling to accommodate student-interns. The Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO), in particular, faces significant hurdles in aligning inter-departmental schedules and managing multi-channel communication, further complicating task allocation and procedural efficiency. These disruptions impact both the interns' ability to integrate seamlessly into their roles and the agencies' operational timelines.

Administrative and logistical challenges further exacerbate the difficulties faced by partner agencies. Lengthy Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) approval processes, as noted by the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO), significantly delay intern onboarding, leaving agencies with little flexibility in planning. Additionally, the lack of logistical resources, such as laptops and other essential equipment, places an operational strain on agencies. This shortage hinders both interns and staff, reducing productivity and creating a suboptimal environment for experiential learning.

Resource and equipment constraints remain a recurring issue, impacting the quality of the internship experience. Many agencies lack access to essential tools, such as updated laptops, which directly affects the interns' ability to complete tasks effectively. Budget constraints further prevent the acquisition of new resources, leading to the reliance on shared or outdated equipment. These limitations not only diminish the interns' learning experience but also slow task performance, reducing the overall efficacy of the internship program.

The lack of mid-internship feedback sessions further limits opportunities for professional growth and skill development. Agencies like the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) emphasize the importance of these sessions for fostering continuous learning and addressing performance issues proactively. Without structured feedback mechanisms, interns miss the chance to refine their skills and align their outputs with agency expectations, ultimately undermining the program's goal of preparing students for public service roles.

Table 4. Recommendations for Improvement

Variables	Key points
Pre-deployment	Implement pre-assessment evaluations, tailor selections, enhance technical and soft skills training, establish clear communication and guidelines.
Internship Proper and Monitoring Support	Use digital tools for tracking, incorporate off-site experiences, provide structured feedback, and ensure flexible and adaptable policies.
Post-internship	Digitalize evaluation processes, conduct tracer studies, facilitate job fairs, and enhance pathways from internship to employment.

The pre-deployment phase plays a crucial role in setting the foundation for a successful internship program. Implementing pre-assessment evaluations allows agencies to match interns to tasks that align with their skills and areas for growth, ensuring a tailored and effective placement process. By enhancing technical and soft skills training prior to deployment, interns are better equipped to meet the demands of their roles. Establishing clear communication channels and providing explicit guidelines further minimizes misunderstandings and promotes a seamless integration into the agencies' workflows. These preparatory steps foster readiness and professionalism among interns, creating a solid starting point for their practical experience.

During the internship proper, effective monitoring and support mechanisms are essential to optimize the learning experience. The integration of digital tools for tracking intern progress not only simplifies administrative tasks but also provides real-time insights into performance and productivity. Incorporating off-site experiences, such as field visits or community engagement projects, adds diversity to the learning environment, enriching the interns' understanding of public administration. Structured feedback sessions serve as pivotal moments for professional growth, allowing interns to refine their skills and align with agency expectations. Flexible and adaptable policies further ensure that unforeseen challenges, such as scheduling conflicts or resource limitations, are addressed without compromising the quality of the program.

Post-internship initiatives are critical for bridging the gap between academic training and employment opportunities. Digitalizing evaluation processes streamlines the assessment and feedback stages, making it easier for both agencies and interns to review performance metrics. Conducting tracer studies helps educational institutions and agencies track the career trajectories of former interns, providing valuable insights for program improvement. Facilitating job fairs and strengthening pathways from internship to employment creates tangible opportunities for interns to transition smoothly into public service roles. These strategies not only enhance the value of the internship experience but also contribute to workforce readiness and professional development.

A comprehensive approach that spans pre-deployment, internship proper, and post-internship phases ensures that the program delivers maximum impact. By addressing gaps in preparation, monitoring, and post-internship transitions, the internship program can align more effectively with the evolving needs of both interns and public sector agencies. This holistic framework not only benefits interns by equipping them with relevant skills and opportunities but also supports agencies in fostering a competent and ready workforce for public administration.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Bachelor of Public Administration (BPA) internship program faces challenges due to logistical and administrative inefficiencies. To improve program effectiveness, recommendations include rigorous selection processes, training for technical and soft skills, and comprehensive orientation. A centralized digital platform for scheduling, monitoring, and feedback is proposed. Digitalized performance monitoring tools are also suggested. Moreover, post-OJT career support is developed, and logistical support is improved. Soft-skill development and digital skills training are also suggested to enhance the internship experience.

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