

THE PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNS: EXPLORING THE ORGANIZATIONAL  
ASSIMILATION PROCESS OF INTERNS AND THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL  
IDENTITY

by

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## **Abstract**

Internships provide students with valuable learning experiences in their chosen fields. Considering that one of the most important components of students' learning experiences during an internship is learning how to socialize and assimilate into organizational settings, an internship stage model should be able to account for this particular process – organizational assimilation. This study contends that existing internship stage models overlap and can be enhanced by organizational assimilation theory (Jablin, 1987). Therefore, this qualitative study includes data from 13 semi-structured interviews with students who participated in formal internships in order to explore students' assimilation experiences during the course of their internships. Additionally, how interns view the host organization's identity and its impact on their assimilation experience was examined. Findings indicate that students are more adaptive to socialization than individualization in terms of their responsibilities and roles during organizational assimilation. Further, the concept of organizational identity was so complex and intricate that students could not grasp their host organizations' identity during the course of their internships; instead, through their organizational assimilation experience, participants learned the culture of the organizations.

Key terms: internship, experiential learning, organizational assimilation, organizational identity

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	v
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 - Literature Review.....	7
Internship Stage Models .....	7
Organizational Entry, Assimilation, and Exit.....	11
Anticipatory Socialization .....	11
Encounter .....	14
Metamorphosis.....	16
Organizational Exit .....	18
Short-term or Temporary Members' Assimilation .....	21
Organizational Identity .....	23
Conceptualization .....	24
Theorizing Organizational Identity.....	25
Organizational Perceptions .....	28
Chapter 3 - Methodology .....	31
Participants.....	32
Procedures.....	33
Chapter 4 - Findings.....	38
Organizational Assimilation Corresponding with Internship Models .....	39
Anticipatory Socialization .....	39
Vocational Anticipatory Socialization.....	40
Organizational Anticipatory Socialization.....	46
Direct Interaction with Recruiters.....	46
Experiencing Workspace .....	50
Dealing with Uncertainties .....	53
Encounter .....	60
Training/Orientation .....	60
Interaction with Organizational Members .....	66

Physical Proximity and Peer Interns' Influence.....	66
Indirect and Direct Socialization with Incumbents, Feedback, and Encouragement ...	72
Personalities/Characteristics and Work Styles.....	82
Metamorphosis.....	86
Exit.....	92
Debriefing .....	92
Uncertainties Regarding Full-time Job Offers and Decision-making.....	96
Organizational Identity .....	102
Chapter 5 - Discussion .....	105
Theoretical Implications .....	105
Organizational Assimilation .....	105
Internship Stage Models .....	108
Organizational Identity and Its Influence on Assimilation.....	110
Practical Implications .....	112
Students.....	112
Host Organizations.....	114
Academic Advisors and Instructors .....	116
Chapter 6 - Conclusion .....	119
Limitations and Future Directions .....	120
References.....	123
Participants' Profiles.....	137
Interview Questions .....	139

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

Professional internships are often recognized as an important event in student career development and are frequently required by universities as part of program curriculum. Considering the competitive nature of the job market, particularly due to the current economic and unemployment conditions in the United States, obtaining an internship has become increasingly difficult. In fact, news articles report that some students pay thousands of dollars to get an internship position (Hancock, 2010; Holiday, 2009; Shih, 2009). Organizations, too, spend a considerable amount of money to sponsor and utilize internship programs. A rough calculation of the direct cost of a summer intern group at Indiana University was \$110,000 to support 55 interns (McCaffery, 1979), and a recent news article reports that the U.S. Department of Agriculture spent two million dollars on an internship program in which only one of the interns was hired in a full-time position (Fox News, August 11, 2012).

Emphasis on the importance of internships for students to provide learning experiences and to organizations for enhanced recruiting has prompted research proposing theoretic models (Garrison, 1983; Lewis & Long, 1981), exploring how to enhance academic-industry relations (Amant, 2003), and evaluating the effectiveness of student performance assessment (Somerrick, 2001). While the development of internship programs has been highlighted as the center of these studies, how student interns use communication during the course of internship has not been given as much attention. Considering that a growing number of organizations recognize communication as a critical activity to their members' satisfaction and effectiveness (Lewis & Long, 1981), this study seeks to extend scholarly understanding of internships as an important academic and career component in a students' education by exploring interns' communication in organizational settings as they become assimilated into their host organizations.

For over 100 years cooperative education has been growing as a significant field (Sovilla & Varty, 2004). The University of Cincinnati first implemented an academic internship program in 1906 (Henry, Razzouk, & Hoverland, 1988). While there is some discussion over which department started the internship program (Henry et al., 1988; Ryder, 1987), the first cooperative program was so successful that many other departments and academic institutions developed similar programs (Sovilla & Varty, 2004). Internship programs today continue because of the potential benefits to students, academic institutions, and host organizations. Below, I will define the parameters of the term “internship” for the purpose of this study, then explore the benefits and drawbacks of internships that make this a worthy communication topic for exploration.

There are several definitions of internships that delineate different purposes and goals of specific programs. For the purpose of this study, this research project uses the definition provided by The National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE): An internship is “any carefully monitored work or service experience in which an individual has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what he/she is learning throughout the experience” (Gilbert, 1997, p. 2). This definition emphasizes students' intentions for participating in internships and how they react to the internship experience. The process of student reflections on their experience can be beneficial to both educational institutions and host organizations in terms of providing feedback to monitor and modify their related programs (Amant, 2003). Additionally, internships can be more clearly distinguished from extracurricular volunteer work or regular part-time jobs because there must be learning intentions, monitoring, and assessment of performance.

Internships provide many benefits, and students often indicate that they find the experience valuable. Potential employment opportunities are one of the most direct benefits for

students with internship experience, which works as an advantage over their peers with similar educational achievement levels (Wilson, 1995). Secondly, an internship provides students with an opportunity to “try on” a career to determine whether or not they like working in their chosen field, allowing students to change direction if necessary (Gavigan, 2010). Third, students can develop skills during their internship that are helpful while in college, such as better time management, self-discipline, and confidence (Knouse, Tanner, & Harris, 1999). Also, student learning outcomes are magnified when student interns make direct connections between education and work experience (Lee, 2006). Lastly, students learn “soft skills” during internships, such as effective communication, social interaction, and teamwork (Schambach & Dirks, 2002).

While there are clear benefits to students working in internships, some experiences can also be detrimental. The most common cause of negative outcomes from internship experiences occurs when students experience a discrepancy between their expectations and the reality of the internship. Specifically, when students develop incorrect or inflated expectations before entering a host organization, they often become frustrated and disappointed during the internship (Baswo & Byrne, 1993; Cook, Parker, & Pettijohn, 2004; Diambra, Cole-Zakrzewski, & Booher, 2004; Knouse et al., 1999). These negative feelings may lead to career changes or decisions to disconnect from their academic program after the internship. Furthermore, if a host organization is not prepared to utilize interns appropriately, this may result in a lack of training or challenges in interns’ jobs. Host organizations’ non-preparedness can confuse interns and make them feel as if they are not welcomed or part of the organization, resulting in dissatisfaction with their internship experience (McCaffery, 1979).



Academic institutions and host organizations have much to gain and lose when working with student interns as well. First, academic institutions benefit when students share their internship experience in the classroom. Class discussions are often enlivened overall by student interns' active participation, which in turn helps the entire class to better understand academic conceptual topics by making associations of class content to the organizational situations (Schambach & Dirks, 2002). Second, academic institutions are able to obtain feedback from both host organizations and students that will allow them to monitor the quality of their academic programs, enhancing curriculum development and course designs (Schambach & Dirks, 2002). Also, maintaining a good relationship with industry organizations results in more internship or recruiting opportunities for students (Lee, 2006). As McCaffery (1979) explains, "...if a school's intern does well in the field, then they advertise the strength of the school's program and increase the market value and marketability of its graduates" (p. 242). Furthermore, host organizations are a potential source of funding and cutting-edge information about what is relevant and important in the industries (Amant, 2003; Lee, 2006). However, not all student interns provide positive images to the host organizations. If student interns do not demonstrate appropriate and satisfying performance, it could affect the academic institutions' images negatively (McCaffery, 1979). Therefore, internships can be a double-edged sword if colleges and universities do not prepare and advise their students well before and during the internship program.

Organizations that offer student internship programs benefit in several ways as well. In particular, employers can make better decisions when it comes to recruitment by having seen the intern's work in their organizations prior to hiring (Cook et al., 2004). That is, employers who have internship programs create a good source of potential employees with experience specific to their organization, while developing an understanding of what to expect from college graduates.

Additionally, the new members hired from internship programs have higher retention rates and increased loyalty. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers' (NACE) 2009 Experiential Education Survey, almost 40% of employers reported a higher retention rate among employees hired via their internship programs. (Internship.com, "10 benefits of starting an intern program"). Considering the cost of hiring and training new members, increased retention rates provide an important benefit for organizations. Furthermore, students bring new ideas and academic concepts, theories, and technologies learned in college classroom to internship employers, which offers organizations a fresh perspective (Cook et al., 2004; Schambach & Dirks, 2002). Despite these benefits, internships can be costly in terms of money invested in programs and time spent training interns who may or may not stay at the host organization. In order to maximize program benefits, internship design and implementation is important to study.

In particular, communication scholars are well poised to look at the practices that influence student interns' understanding and integration into organizations because what is and is not communicated to interns has a direct bearing on interpretations of the internship experience. This study seeks to build upon the existing internship models to enhance theoretic understanding of internships and provide practical suggestions to improve the likelihood of successful internship programs. In doing so, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the communication discipline. Exploring the intersections of two organizational communication theories that are applied to examining students' internship experiences – organizational assimilation and organizational identity – will extend scholarly understanding of these communication theories. Also, this study makes important strides to enhance knowledge pertaining to temporary/part-time employees' socialization since internships are considered as

short-term employment. Lastly, organizations that offer student internship programs or plan on designing programs, as well as academic advisors, can benefit from analyzing students' honest feedback on their internship experiences, which will allow organizations to take full advantage of the benefits and prevent disadvantages that internship can bring.

Following is a discussion of the existing internship models, organizational assimilation processes and organizational identity theory. These models and theories inform the resulting explanation of research methodology, results, and discussion of findings.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

### Internship Stage Models

To better understand how to maximize benefits of internship programs and reduce negative experiences, scholars have theorized stage models to guide students towards successful internships. While existing internship models capture the unique nature of internship processes, they do not account for the important process of how students become assimilated into the host organization. For example, Diambra et al. (2004) investigated student internship experiences from the perspectives of three different internship stage models: Inkster and Ross (1993), Sweitzer and King (1994, 1995), and Kiser (2000). The models appear to be similar in some ways, but the scholars note that each stage model offers unique attributes. In order to explore how scholars have studied internships and attempted to theorize the process, an overview of the three stage models will be discussed briefly.

First, Kiser (2000)'s model provides four stages for the internship process: (1) pre-placement, (2) initiation, (3) working, and (4) termination. The *pre-placement stage* describes all the activities before students actually start their internship, such as searching for an internship, discussions with academic advisors, and contacting the future supervisors. The *initiation stage* is simply when students start working for the organization as an intern, going through orientations and learning about the new environment. The *working stage* is explained positively in that students become competent and comfortable in doing their tasks independently and identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, *termination* occurs when students make planned efforts to leave the organization and reflect on their learning outcomes. This model is the least detailed, yet it does a nice job explaining stages of the overall internship process in a chronological manner,

where the timeline and the natural progression of interns are easily identified. Nevertheless, student interns' emotional changes or task accomplishments are difficult to incorporate in this generic model.

Sweitzer and King's (1994, 1995) model offers inclusion of emotions that are not discussed in the Kiser (2000) model, incorporating the following five stages: (1) anticipation, (2) disillusionment, (3) confrontation, (4) competence, and (5) culmination. First, *anticipation* explains the positive anxiety at mild to moderate levels that students feel due to uncertainties about the internship. Then, once students enter the organization, they feel disappointed and worried about their performance because of the unmet expectations in the *disillusionment* stage. After they experience this lowered enthusiasm, students confront and try to overcome and resolve the frustrations, leading to the next stage, *competence*. In this stage, students show high self-esteem and sense of achievement. The final stage, *culmination*, is expected to be different for individuals in terms of their emotional changes in dealing with closure with supervisors and co-workers. This model is recommended by Diambra et al. (2004) to focus on the feelings student interns develop during internship experiences.

Lastly, Inkster and Ross's (1993) model is recommended when studying a combination of emotions and activities as well as the orderly progression of an internship (Diambra et al., 2004). Inkster and Ross (1993) include six stages for the internship experience: (1) arranging and anticipating, (2) orientation and establishing identity, (3) reconciling expectation with reality, (4) productivity and independence, (5) closure, and (6) re-entry and practical application. This model does not label the stages, but assigns numbers for each stage. *Stage one* occurs when students seek internship positions, and they can be excited, motivated, or in doubt while doing so. *Stage two* starts when students arrive in the host organizations and learn about the workplace,

feeling either overwhelmed or underwhelmed. Advancing to *stage three*, students realize that their initial expectations are different from reality. However, *stage four*, describes that students then become confident, productive, and independent, as Sweitzer and King’s (1995) model discusses their “competence” stage. *Stage five* is closure, which is equivalent to the “culmination” stage in Sweitzer and King’s model (1995) and “termination” stage in Kiser’s model (2000). In this stage, students need to end their relationships with organizational members, celebrate accomplishments, and may sometimes feel jealous of the new incoming interns. Finally, *stage six* is unique to this model, where students readjust to return to their classrooms or may return to the host organization after graduation. During this re-entry period, students may experience different feelings; for example, some might struggle with a resulting mundane lifestyle without the internship while others may feel confident and excited to contribute to the classroom discussions by sharing their internship experiences. This model is relatively clear and specific enough to explore emotive and sequential properties, while the other two models overlap and are less distinguishing (Diambra et al., 2004).

**Table 1.1** Comparison of Internship Stage Models

Scholars	Internship Process						
<b>Kiser (2000)</b>	Pre-placement	Initiation		Working		Termination	
<b>Sweitzer &amp; King (1994)</b>	Anticipation	Disillusionment	Confrontation	Competence	Culmination		
<b>Inkster &amp; Ross (1993)</b>	Stage One (Seeking and securing placement)	Stage Two (Initial arrival, learning new information and establishing a workplace identity)	Stage Three (Realizing the differences between reality and initial expectations)	Stage Four (Achieve high productivity, independence, and self-confident)	Stage Five (Closure: discontinuing relationships and celebrating accomplishments)	Stage Six/Final (Re-entry and practical application)	

Even though Diambra et al. (2004) successfully tested the three models, drawing helpful implications and recommendation for future researchers, it is difficult to standardize the internship experience because of model inconsistency. Noting that considerable efforts have been made to standardize internship programs and develop guidelines in internship literature, a more efficient stage model may better explain the overall internship experience across a diversity of professions and careers and would be beneficial in ensuring successful passage through an internship program. More importantly, the existing stage models do not explain organizational assimilation processes that may be critical to experiences during the internship. Internship literature often discusses one of the benefits of internships as “getting more experience” or “learning professional skills” without connecting those experiences or skills with stages in the organizational assimilation process.

These existing internship stage models could be more accurate if they were adjusted to account for the process of students becoming a member of the host organization, socializing with other interns and employers, and eventually integrating into the organizational culture. MaCaffery (1979) asserts, "...once an intern has become sensitized to communication behavior patterns in one organization, he will look for similar patterns in any other organization he may join later" (p. 244). Therefore, while student interns may learn work tasks or technical skills for a particular job, communication experiences are also central in shaping perceptions and expectations about future positions. If students decide to switch their career paths after an internship experience, the job-related knowledge may not be directly applicable to their future career, while the perceptions of their experience will persist and influence expectations and communication. In other words, internship experiences impact how students learn to become an integrated member of an organization and adapt to organizational culture and behavior.

Therefore, as will be further discussed below, by integrating concepts from organizational assimilation with existing internship models, scholars can better understand how communication experience in internships can be beneficial for students' future careers and how students make sense of the learning experience.

### **Organizational Entry, Assimilation, and Exit**

Even though student interns' positions and status are different from full-time employees, obtaining an internship often involves a similar process including recruitment, orientation, and on-the-job training. The process of people joining, becoming part of, and leaving organizations has interested many organizational scholars and generated considerable research (i.e., Davis & Myers, 2012; Kramer, 2010; Myers & Oetzel, 2003; Waldeck & Myers, 2007). In particular, Jablin (1987) integrates existing studies on separate elements of organizational entry, assimilation, and exit into a singular, developmental theory. Jablin's (1987) organizational assimilation theory is considered to be the most comprehensive model to date, inspiring extensive research (Wien, 2006). In particular, organizational assimilation is a key construct that encompasses the process by which individuals become integrated into the culture of organizations (Jablin, 2001; Waldeck & Myers, 2007). To explore the theory and apply it to student interns' situations, the three stages will be reviewed and discussed.

#### ***Anticipatory Socialization***

Anticipatory socialization refers to efforts made prior to joining the organization to learn about the organization. Jablin (1987) divides anticipatory socialization into two parts: vocational anticipatory socialization and organizational anticipatory socialization. Vocational anticipatory socialization provides a broad sense of learning about jobs and working in general. Sources of



vocational information include family members, educational institutions, part-time job experience, peers and friends, and the media (Jablin, 1987). Individuals intentionally or unintentionally learn about work naturally from the environments in which they grow up or observe. Whereas, organizational anticipatory socialization is learning and developing expectations about the organization and the job position based on two source categories: (1) organizational literature such as job advertisements or official websites, (2) interpersonal interactions with other applicants or interviewers/recruiters (Jablin, 1987). Student interactions formally and informally pertaining to obtaining an internship position falls into the category of organizational anticipatory socialization.

Generally, job applicants have unrealistic, typically positively inflated expectations about potential work positions because organizations tend to focus on communicating the positive features of the organization to applicants (Wanous, 1997, 1980). However, these overly positive assessments become problematic; the more unrealistic and inflated job applicant's expectations are, the more difficult it becomes to meet their expectations once they are on the job. Further, if an individual's expectations are not met, it could lead to greater chances of job turnover and lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Porter & Steers, 1973). Therefore, anticipatory socialization, specifically organizational anticipatory socialization, may be critical to intern's interpretations, potentially impacting their future work experiences.

In the case of interns, organizational anticipatory socialization can also occur through activities and additional sources, such as talking with an internship coordinator/advisor at their academic institution, taking an internship seminar, or attending job fairs. Any learning and socialization effort before joining an internship is considered organizational anticipatory

socialization; however, when considering a student's career span, the internship experience itself can function as anticipatory socialization for future work experiences.

McCaffery (1979) explains that interns treat their internship as a means to further professionalization, and an intern's satisfaction is not based on the job itself, but in what the position promises for the future. Because work experience during an internship influences the students' anticipatory socialization in reference to their host organization, where they may seek permanent employment after graduation, student interns can develop more realistic expectations by completing an internship. Yet, scholars recommend that academic advisors should help student develop more accurate expectation even before students start their internships, because experiencing disappointment and confusion during an internship can be detrimental for students' career development (Basow & Byrne, 1993).

This anticipatory socialization stage can certainly be applied to internships. In fact, the three internship stage models reviewed in the earlier section included a stage where students develop expectations or prepare for an internship. Inkster and Ross's model (1993) describes their first stage as "student seeking out and securing a placement" and explains that accomplishing these tasks would leave students with excitement, ideal expectations, and high motivations. Sweitzer and King's (1995) first stage is anticipation, which is very similar to Jablin's anticipatory socialization stage, but more vague. Kiser's model (2000) also has a stage titled pre-placement, when interns identify, investigate, interview and determine an internship placement. In summary, all three models incorporate an "everything that happens prior to internship" stage, but with slightly different emphasis on order or resulting emotions and attitudes. Using Jablin's term "anticipatory socialization" would provide a synthesized theoretical understanding of this stage, reflecting what happens prior to internships as a part of the

socialization process where students transform from organizational outsiders to participating and effective members of the organization (Feldman, 1981).

### *Encounter*

The encounter stage begins when a new member enters an organization and is socialized through orientation and trainings. In this stage, newcomers start learning what is “normal” to incumbents in terms of norms and behaviors. Jablin (1987) notes that this stage can be a traumatic period and a destructive phase for newcomers if they experience a high discrepancy between their initial expectations and reality. The discrepancy can affect newcomers’ level of satisfaction with their supervisors, although scholars note that newcomers are often dissatisfied with their first bosses because the supervisors are not sensitive to the newcomers’ experience (Jablin, 1987; Katz, 1985). During this encounter stage where newcomers often experience confusion and frustration, interactions with coworkers are very important. Research findings suggest that a major concern of newcomers is to be accepted by coworkers before they can feel competent on the job (Feldman, 1977).

Two different interrelated assimilation processes occur in the encounter phase of Jablin's assimilation model (1987): socialization and individualization. Socialization occurs when an organization attempts to influence and change newcomers to meet organizational needs, whereas individualization occurs when newcomers’ attempt to change the organization and manage their roles/responsibilities to meet their individual needs (Jablin, 1987). To illustrate, socialization occurs when organizations try to “reaffirm existing working relationships and moves newcomers to cultivate custodial roles” and individualization takes places when newcomers “create new ways of working, take risks, and adopt innovative roles” (Barge & Schlueter, 2004, p. 237).

It is important to note that the terms “socialization” and “assimilation” have been used almost interchangeably. To clarify, assimilation is defined as “the processes by which individuals become integrated into the culture of an organization” (Jablin, 2001, p. 755), and socialization is defined as “the manner in which the experiences of people learning the ropes of a new organizational position, status, or role are structured for them by others within the organization” (Van Maanen, 1978, p. 19). Scholars note that the definition of socialization fails to acknowledge that individuals actively innovate and create roles for themselves within the organization (Jablin, 1982), because organizational members are more than passive recipients of what organizations offer; in fact, newcomers may have special skills that will allow them to hold some latitude in role negotiations (Hess, 1993). To address this, the concept of individualization was introduced to explain how new members attempt to change organizations to meet their needs (Jablin, 1982).

The nature of the encounter stage, which can be either positive or destructive, is also noted in two of the three internship stage models reviewed in the earlier section. Inkster and Ross’s model (1993) explains that in stage three, student interns realize their initial expectations may not match the reality of the workplace. This disconnect may be partially attributed to differences between classroom and workplace structures and demands. In Sweitzer and King’s model (1995), disillusionment and confrontation stages explain similar situations that students may experience during the encounter stage. The disillusionment stage highlights student interns’ lowered morale, task accomplishment, and enthusiasm/excitement. Further, the confrontation stage explains that students will recognize earlier disappointments and seek to resolve their reactions and underlying frustrations experienced in the disillusionment stage. Therefore, Sweitzer and King (1995) identify the students’ experience, resulting emotions, and actions students may take. However, while this model generalizes students’ experiences, one drawback

is that it does not acknowledge various types of students' reactions upon entering the organization. Also, one cannot be certain that student interns will experience these emotions and stages as a linear process. In fact, some interns may never experience the disillusionment and or the confrontation stage at all. Therefore, Jablin's (1987) encounter stage may be a more encompassing and appropriate model for student's experiences once they begin their internship in an organizational setting.

### *Metamorphosis*

The next stage, metamorphosis, explains the long-term process of settling in, when newcomers transition to become full members of the organization and no longer consider themselves as “newcomers” (Jablin, 1987, 2001; Myers & Oetzel, 2003). Assimilation is the process of integrating into the organizational culture and is not a phenomenon that happens at a specific point. As discussed earlier, the process of assimilation begins from the very first stage – vocational and organizational anticipatory socialization, continues throughout the encounter stage when individuals gain knowledge about the organization, and peaks throughout metamorphosis when individuals achieve high levels of assimilation and become fully participating members (Jablin, 1987).

During this stage, newcomers learn new attitudes and behaviors or modify the ones they already have to be consistent with the organizations' expectations and become accepted and fully participating members of the organization. However, it becomes problematic to determine exactly when a newcomer passes through organizational assimilation stages and experiences metamorphosis (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). According to Jablin (2001), many organizations identify the newcomer as a member approximately three to six months after beginning employment. Yet, this designation does not acknowledge that some newcomers assimilate more quickly and also

may assimilate in one aspect of organizational life more rapidly than in other aspects (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992).

Despite difficulty in objectively determining when the metamorphosis phase begins, this phase is important because individuals experience "role management" as they are both cooperative and innovative in dealing with ongoing changes during their membership. Thus, Kramer (2010) notes that it would be appropriate to consider that the transition from encounter to metamorphosis occurs when individuals no longer consider themselves as newcomers.

For student interns, the metamorphosis phase can be even more complicated to determine whether or when the transition is made. Some interns may successfully assimilate into the host organization, experiencing the metamorphosis phase before the internship program ends. On the other hand, some students might not be satisfied with their internship experience and fail to assimilate into the organization, although they may finish the internship program and fulfill the specified program requirements.

The three internship models indicate that students become productive and feel comfortable with their tasks and working with site supervisors. Inkster and Ross's (1993) *stage four* occurs when students' efforts contribute to the workplace, and supervisors recognize student's competence leading to increased independence. Sweitzer and King's (1995) model includes the competence stage where students have high morale, accomplishment, and high self-esteem, etc. Similarly, according to Kiser (2000), the working stage occurs when students and supervisors become more comfortable and accomplish learning goals. These later stages of the internship models hint at signs that are related to individual's beginning feelings of full membership, which are the beginning steps to making the transition into metamorphosis (Jablin, 1987, 2001); however, the stage models do not account for student interns' full membership

(complete assimilation/metamorphosis) into host organizations and interns becoming fully participating members who identify with the organizational culture.

The metamorphosis stage in the organizational assimilation model primarily has been applied to full time employees, yet the internship models do recognize similar indicators of high levels of assimilation that occur during short term internships. In fact, metamorphosis may be the reason why students become confident and highly productive towards the end of the internships, or transition into metamorphosis may occur after students become independent and fruitful members of their host organizations. Thus, it would be beneficial to explore the metamorphosis stage more directly in internship programs and examine whether/how students achieve the final stage of assimilation in order to enhance understanding of this stage.

### ***Organizational Exit***

Organizational exit is defined as the process by which members prepare to leave an organization. Even though this process is separate from the assimilation stage model, it is important to discuss how members' use communication when disengaging from the organization and discontinuing work relationships. Davis and Myers (2012) argue that the topic of role exit has received little attention compared to role entry, and Jablin (1987) also notes that, considering that people exit jobs just as frequently as they enter them, "the investigation of communication processes associated with job/organizational-disengagement have been fairly infrequent objects of study" (p. 717).

There are numerous reasons for members to leave organizations. *Involuntary* exit occurs, for example, when organizations need to downsize, move its operations to a different location, or decide to terminate its members' employment due to poor performance (Doerfel & Connaughton, 2006). Despite the involuntary nature of organizational exit, many considered it

more important to pay attention to cases of *voluntary* exit because organizations do not want high turnover rates, therefore try to find ways to prevent it. Organizational members might choose to leave the organization due to physical reasons (i.e. maternity), retirement, low self-esteem or self-confidence in their jobs, or low job satisfaction and commitment, among other reasons (Ashcraft, 1999; Davis, 2009; Doerfel & Connaughton, 2006). In the case of full-time employees' involuntary exit, they may "voice" their discontent or disagreement with the organization by disengaging and withdrawing, instead of physically leaving the organization (Jablin, 1987). Ultimately, if disengagement does not create change, members' dissatisfaction with their work relationships may result in intentions to terminate employment, eventually leading to organizational exit.

However, student interns' experience with organizational exit is different from full-time members'. Organizational exit among interns is planned from the beginning based on the predetermined period for the internship program, representing a unique circumstance (Davis & Myers, 2012). In fact, deciding whether or not to stay is often not an option for student interns. Internships, as part of experiential learning programs, often ask students to actively reflect on their learning outcomes towards the end of the internship period. For interns, this planned exit and reflection may impact students' levels of overall satisfaction with the internship experience. Also, host organizations sometimes offer final reports or assessments regarding students' internship performance, which may have bearing on their planned exit.

Accordingly, all three internship stage models reviewed in the earlier section include a stage describing students' experience with closure. Kiser (2000) includes a stage labeled termination and Sweitzer and King (1994) include a culmination stage to explain the process in which students discontinue their work relationships, celebrate their accomplishments or learning



outcomes, and sometimes feel jealous of new interns. Inkster and Ross (1993) divide this final stage into two parts: stage five parallels the other two models, while stage six discusses how interns experience re-entry into school and practically apply newly learned skills. Inkster and Ross (1993) assert that students share their learning experiences in classrooms upon returning to their academic institutions and may go back to the internship organization after graduation.

Therefore, according to these models, organizational exit is an important part of students' internship experiences in addition to their assimilation. Jablin's organizational exit does not account for Inkster and Ross's (1993) stage six, the unique post-exit experience for student interns; however, considering that post-exit experiences and consequences look drastically different from individuals and this study primarily examines student interns' assimilation experiences during the course of internship, discussion on "what happens afterwards" will be not be made in this particular study. Importantly, organizational exit is a communicative process in which student interns will face and deal with the loss of their membership and work relationships, which can be influenced by how much they have become assimilated into the organization.

In conclusion, this section explored organizational entry, assimilation and exit, and explained how organizational assimilation processes relate directly to internship stage models. Organizational assimilation provides a construct to bridge diverse contexts within the communication discipline (Waldeck & Myers, 2007). Waldeck and Myers (2007) contend that substantial research has been conducted on the process and the outcomes of assimilation, but less work has been done to reveal the antecedent conditions that predict assimilation experiences. To address this call, this study considers how students experience assimilation during internships as part of anticipatory socialization, impacting their permanent or full-time jobs in the future.

**Table 1.2** Comparison of Internship Stage Models to Jablin’s Assimilation Model

Scholars	Internship Process					
<b>Jablin’s</b> Assimilation model (2001)	Anticipatory socialization	Encounter		Metamorphosis	Organizational Exit	
<b>Kiser</b> (2000)	Pre-placement	Initiation	Working		Termination	
<b>Sweitzer &amp; King</b> (1994)	Anticipation	Disillusionment	Confrontation	Competence	Culmination	
<b>Inkster &amp; Ross</b> (1993)	Stage One  (Seeking and securing placement)	Stage Two  (Initial arrival, learning new information and establishing a workplace identity)	Stage Three  (Realizing the differences between reality and initial expectations)	Stage Four  (Achieve high productivity, independence, and self-confident)	Stage Five  (Closure: discontinuing relationships and celebrating accomplishments)	Stage Six/Final  (Re-entry and practical application)

The next section discusses important similarities and differences of internship positions compared to full-time employment. Research efforts have explored the organizational assimilation process of full-time employees; however, part-time or temporary employees have received less attention. Since student interns are classified as part-time or temporary employees, although the actual length or types of employment varies depending on the students' majors and internships, the following section will discuss part-time or temporary employees' assimilation, leading to the primary research question of this study.

***Short-term or Temporary Members’ Assimilation***

Since 1969, part-time jobs have expanded as companies attempt to reduce labor costs (Tilly, 1991). Tilly (1991) explains that involuntary part-time workers who would prefer full-time work account for the majority of the growth in the part-time workforce. Further, part-time employees comprise almost one-fifth of the U.S. workforce. Interestingly, this trend is not

limited to the U.S. workforce, but also represents an international trend (Barling & Gallagher, 1996).

Considering the fact that organizations are relying increasingly on part-time workers, additional research is required to explore part-time workers' experience. "In many ways and for many years, part-time workers have been the 'missing persons' in organizational research" (Feldman & Doeringhaus, 1992, p. 59). There have been calls for more theoretic research, especially to determine if part-time and full-time workers differ in their attitude and behavior (Thorsteinson, 2003). This additional research may assist organizations in developing helpful practices and interventions applicable to both part-time and full-time workers (Wien, 2006).

Although limited, attempts have been made to apply traditional organizational theories to part-time work. Based on the assumption that part-time workers may not experience clear stages of entry and assimilation, Wien (2006) examined part-time workers to determine if they theoretically fit Jablin's (1987) model of organizational assimilation. Wien (2006) reports that two characteristics of organizational members' assimilation directly relate to the study of part-time employees: (1) individuals are members of multiple social systems and have multiple roles/responsibilities; (2) both individuals and organizations have interactive influence. These characteristics also relate to student internships. First, student interns have at least two responsibilities: being a student or a learner, and being an intern or a part-time worker, representing multiple social systems, roles, and responsibilities. Also, when students become an intern, they are only partially included in the organization, which often leads to the assumption that the student may have less job involvement and satisfaction compared to full-time employees.

Second, in terms of interactive influence, organizational assimilation is a mutual process. Once new members enter organizations, individuals attempt to "individualize" their jobs by

changing their roles, attitudes, and values to meet their needs (Jablin, 1987). Also, organizations "socialize" members through various activities and efforts. In terms of student interns who are a special type of part-time worker, students are recruited to work, but also to learn. Intern orientation, job training, and direct supervision experiences may be structured in various ways, influencing student interns' assimilation. In order to better understand internships theoretically in terms of the experiential learning models and organizational assimilation and to add to knowledge about part-time work, the first research question asks:

**RQ1.** How do student interns experience the organizational assimilation process during the limited time period of their internship?

In addition to organizational assimilation, organizational identity theory provides a theoretical underpinning to explore organizational assimilation among intern students further. In particular, Wien (2006) suggests that researchers continue to make theoretical links among various socialization practices. Organizational identity, as will be further discussed, is a natural fit for examining the assimilation process (Kramer, 2010). In particular, identity issues are explicitly part of the sense-making processes (Weick, 1995) and scholars have called for examining identity as the central concept of assimilation (Forward & Scheerhornd, 1996). Therefore, the next section will discuss organizational identity theory.

## **Organizational Identity**

Student interns' assimilation experiences may be influenced by the way they view and characterize their host organizations' identity. Organizational identity is the "concept that organizations use to characterize aspects of themselves" (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 265). As Jablin (1987) explains, the process of organizational assimilation is not a one-way process, but a mutual and reciprocal one between organizations and members. When interns encounter the host

organizations, they learn what the organization is really about and what internal members think of the organization – building perceptions of organizational identity. As interns become assimilated into the organization, the perceived organizational identity likely enhances or decreases the speed or level of their assimilation. Hence, this study argues that, student interns' perceptions of the host organizations' identities affect their assimilation process.

### *Conceptualization*

Identity is one of the least well-understood concepts (Hall, 1996). Albert and Whetten (1985) developed organizational identity theory, recognizing that the issue of identity is a profound and consequential one, yet at the same time, it is an idea that is difficult to conceptualize. They explain, “What the identity literature offers is not a single concept of theory but a diverse set of ideas, modes of analysis, questions and propositions” (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 265).

In order to determine an organization's identity, Albert and Whetten (1985) recommend studying organizational members' answers to the question, “Who are we as an organization?” More specifically, when organizations face choices of some consequence, such as which new products to market or which companies to acquire, questions of goals and values are aroused. When discussion of these goals and values becomes heated, identity questions are asked – “Who are we?” “What kind of business are we in?” and “What do we want to be?” It may also be possible that when organizations take on new members, such as employees or interns, this change may spark either an affirmation or a questioning of the current identity.

Three criteria must be satisfied for an adequate statement of organizational identity: the features should 1) be a central character/essence of the organization, 2) distinguish the organization from others (distinctiveness), and 3) be exhibited by some degree of sameness or

continuity over time (enduring) (Albert & Whetten, 1985). These criteria have been used in organizational identity research; however, the extent to which an identity must be enduring has been questioned based on frequent changes in organizational environments (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2002).

The concept of organizational identity has inspired research in management and organizational studies and is an understandable and salient theory for both academic and practitioner audiences, providing scholars with the tantalizing possibility of a concept that can cross the theory-practice divide (Gioia et al., 2002). Contemporary organizations are part of a dynamic and complex organizational environment, making a clear sense of an organizational identity increasingly important (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000). Furthermore, in postindustrial times there are more options to select identity rather than accepting a given identity, resulting in more tolerance of identity diversity and frequent identity changes over the life course of an organization (Gergen, 1991). In addition, organizations must also negotiate increasing exposure to critical voices through media and business analysts, which reveal organizational strategy, management style, organizational processes and other identity aspects (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Therefore, identity is problematic but simultaneously critical to navigate through key events and activities in organization (Albert et al., 2000).

### ***Theorizing Organizational Identity***

Despite the fact that organizational identity became a traceable topic of social scientific inquiry less than 20 years ago, it has received increasing attention in the last few years for several reasons. First, organizational leaders have sought to understand how an organization is perceived as it deals with ongoing change (Aust, 2004). Second, organizational scientists have given increased attention to the “processes of identification and disidentification” as the body of

organizational research has grown (Albert, 1998, pp. 11-12). “Although these two reasons provide ample justification for further organizational inquiry, a recurring oversight in most trans-disciplinary organizational literature raises a third justification,” many organizational researchers have underestimated the importance of communication to organizational processes (Aust, 2004, p. 516)

Since Albert and Whetten’s (1985) seminal article, the field of organizational identity has grown to become a prominent domain of inquiry in the management literature (Oliver & Roos, 2003). Organizational identity has both theoretical and practical values prompting the application and development of identity in management and human resources related research. Additionally, research in the communication field aligns well with organizational identity theory because “communication is the social glue that ties members, subunits, and organizations together...without communication, organizations do not exist” (Euske & Roberts, p. 42). Scott (2007) further explains that “...issues of identity and identification are fundamentally communicative ones because we express our belongingness to various collectives, assess the reputation and image of those collectives, and the social costs and rewards of maintaining various identities are revealed” (p. 124).

Social identity, an individual’s self-concept constructed by perceived membership in a group (Turner & Oakes, 1986), is a related concept to organizational identity. Social identity is an individual or micro-level theory, whereas organizational identity is macro-level. “Over the last five years or so, social identity researchers have increasingly applied social identity principles to organizational contexts” (Knippenberg & Hogg, 2001, p. 185). Since it was first introduced to organizational studies, social identity theory has become firmly entrenched as a vital lens through which to understand issues of identity and identification as they relate to

organizations (Scott, 2007). The integration of social identity theory and communication in identity scholarship promises a better understanding of essential issues related to identification and organization, but it is important to note that distinguishing the concept of identification from identity is problematic.

Albert et al. (2000) observed that there is little consensus regarding the meaning and definition of the terms organizational identity and organizational identification. What has been agreed on is that both identity and identification can be viewed as “root constructs” in organizational studies, in that everyday entities need to have a sense of who or what they are, who or what other entities are, and how the entities are associated (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). While Albert et al. (2000) view the lack of universal agreement as an impediment to progress, others desire a distinction between identification and identity. Therefore, the differentiation of these related concepts is necessary.

Organizational identity is a concept that organizations use to characterize aspects of themselves through self-reflexive questions (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Whereas, organizational identification is defined as a specific form of social identification that reflects the ways in which individuals define themselves in terms of their membership in a particular organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1995). Organizational identification examines the process whereby an individual’s identity becomes psychologically intertwined with the organization’s identity (Cole & Bruch, 2006). To sum, organizational identity is viewed at a collectivistic level and organizational identification is viewed at an individual level. In relation to organizational assimilation process, newcomers first learn what the organization’s identity is during *encounter* stage through various communication activities such as asking questions and hearing stories from supervisors. Once individuals transition to the metamorphosis stage, they will adapt to or attempt to modify the



organizational identity, eventually relating the organizational identity as similar to their individual identities.

In later research, Whetten (2006) explains two core assumptions for the conception of organizational identity: 1) organizations are more than social collectives, in that modern society treats organizations in many respects as if they were individuals, and 2) identity can be equated with an actor's subjective sense of uniqueness, referred to as the self-view or self-definition and reflected in notions such as self-governance and self-actualization. Despite Whetten's attempt to formulate a level-free conception of identity, for the purpose of research, it is useful to make a distinction at which level organizational identity is being studied. For this study, organizational identity is examined at the macro-level, viewing an organization as a whole in which organizational members perceive its identity as a collective organism. Linking organizational identity theory to organizational assimilation, the next section will discuss how external or internal audiences' perceive organizational identity.

### ***Organizational Perceptions***

In business management, organizational identity is considered as manageable for organizations' strategic uses. Specifically, organizational perception management refers to something that is "designed to influence audience perceptions of the organization as an entity or whole. Such perceptions include organizational images, reputations, and identities" (Elsbach, 2006). Each of these – image, reputation, and identity – represents different concepts.

First, *reputation* is more general than image and is decided by considering the ranking or status that is perceived or legitimated by *external* audiences. Corporate reputation is a very important asset for a firm. For example, in the microcomputer market, even though IBM did not

have the most innovative or least expensive personal computer on the market, it initially made a rapid rise in the market primarily based on the company's reputation (Verity, 1984).

Second, *organizational image* is perceived by both internal and external audiences while reputation and organizational identity are either perceived internally or externally, but not both (Elsbach, 2006). Organizational images are relatively short-lived, and organizations may have several distinctive images. Also, organizational image and reputation typically answer questions about the organizations' fit with one type of distinctiveness or status categorization at a time.

Third, *organizational identity* is the answer to internal members' question, "who are we?" (Elsbach, 2006). While reputation and organizational image are easy to distinguish, organizational identity tends to be more intricate and difficult to clearly differentiate. The answer to the question, "who are we as an organization?" may be complex, including both organizational image and reputation. Similar to reputation, organizational identity is commonly perceived as enduring (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994), yet researchers have suggested that identity is not immutable and that identity management can successfully change an organization's identity. Elsbach (2006) defines organizational identity as an "insider's relatively enduring perceptions of the fit of their organization with distinctiveness categorizations and status categorizations along both general and specific dimensions" (p. 20).

When students join organizations as interns, they become one of the "insiders" or internal audiences within the organization. It is likely that as interns socialize with the full-time members, they will learn how members view the organization as well as develop their own perceptions of the organizational identity through trainings and interactions with site supervisors.

Organizational identity theory guides this study in exploring student interns' assimilation experience by observing how student interns perceive the host organizations' identity as well as

the influence on interns' level of assimilation. Ultimately, this study aims to bridge the two communication theories, organizational assimilation theory and organizational identity theory.

This leads to the second research question:

**RQ2:** How are interns' perceptions of organizational identity shaped throughout the internship experience, and how does it influence their assimilation?

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

The majority of internship program research uses a quantitative approach, asking students to complete questionnaires to determine students' levels of satisfaction with their internship or the skills obtained during the internship (Basow & Byrne, 1993; Cook et al., 2004; Knouse et al., 1999; McCaffery, 1979; Schambach & Dirks, 2002). The analyses of these surveys typically include comparisons of participant gender, college major, and amount of previous work experience (Knouse et al., 1999; McCaffery, 1979). While most of these studies reveal that students regard their internship positively, less is known about the processes contributing to overall ratings of satisfaction and skill development. This study adds to the scholarly understanding of internships and related theories by using qualitative interviews to explore internship experiences holistically, collecting the unique stories and personalized interpretations of events that are not captured through survey research.

Specifically, the focus of this study is to ask questions which examine the processes of communication in individual internship experiences. In order to best explore these experiences, open ended initial and follow-up questions let the interviewer adapt questions for each participant and obtain intricate details including student interns' emotions and coping strategies during their internship process (Ivey, 2012; Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). In particular, as Daugherty (2011) explains in a study comparing public relations interns' and site supervisors' perspectives through interviews, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand participants' underlying expectations about internships and others as well as hear interpretations of the meaning of their experiences such as why they think certain things happened or what it meant for them to deal with different situations.

Additionally, full, honest, in-depth criticism or feedback from student interns is beneficial for both educators and host organizations (Amant, 2003). Such feedback will help educators to better prepare students for the workforce and assist employers in assessing job skills and abilities of incoming employees, ultimately enhancing the design of employee training. Although faculty members or site supervisors receive some feedback from internship program participants, interns can fear reprisal by advisors or internship providers and therefore might be tempted to give more “benign” reports (Amant, 2003). This study seeks to contribute to scholarly understanding of internships by seeking students’ honest thoughts, perspectives and interpretation of internship experiences from interviews outside their respective internship programs.

### **Participants**

Qualified participants for the interviews were college students in various stages of their academic program and recent college graduates with internship experience within less than two years. Thirteen student interns participated in interviews for this study; eight participants were seniors, three were juniors, and two graduated within the past two years. Since internships are programmed in various ways, such as paid or unpaid, for or not for academic credit, and voluntary or required, the participants came from a wide range of forms and types of internship experiences. Four participants had unpaid internships and nine were paid. Three students interned at nonprofit organizations, three interned at large structured corporations, and the remaining seven interned at either small or medium-sized for-profit offices. The average internship length was approximately four months, with more than half of the participants completing summer internships.

This broad sampling was not intended to create generalizable results, but instead, to capture assimilation and identity components that inform theories and practices in

communication in a variety of internship experiences (See Appendix A for participant profiles and descriptions of internship organizations). Since the goal of this study is to explore students' overall internship experience in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of interns' perceptions regarding assimilation and identity across majors and organizations, students with various academic or work backgrounds were recruited. Participants' majors included Communication, Business, Biology, Animal Sciences, Leadership Studies, and Global Studies from two different universities in the Midwest.

Kramer (2011) contends that most assimilation research focuses on one part of the process, such as organizational entry, without examining the process comprehensively. Therefore, this study of student interns examined the comprehensive process of organizational assimilation, from anticipatory socialization to planned exit from student interns' points of view. Further, although internships in which interviewees participated may look very different from each other, the main goal of this study is to observe how students feel, think, and react to those various experiences as they go through assimilation process, rather than limiting findings to one specific internship situation. The process of recruiting and conducting interviews will be discussed in the following section.

## **Procedures**

Recruitment procedures involved primarily a snowball sampling method by approaching potential participants through "referral" or "mouth-to-mouth" mechanism (Welch, 1975). Because a limited number of students partake in internships, using a snowball method helped to identify participants who qualified for the study. Further, because student interns knew the person who recommended them for the interview, snowball methodology allowed the researcher to quickly build rapport with the interviewees. In other words, snowball sampling worked well as

a useful technique for capturing information from individuals that were hard to identify. There are several biases that exist in snowball sampling processes, such as under-sampling those isolated members of the community or oversampling those who have been exposed to many contacts; however, as Welch (1975) explains, these biases are minimized, especially as the sample size grows and many different networks are included. In order to capture individuals from multiple networks, students in an introductory communication class, personal contacts through discussing this study, and an internship director served as initial contact sources that were expanded by asking for references from the participants. No more than three participants came from a single source; for instance, the internship director referred multiple students over time, but they were from different classes and majors. This way, the potential biases during the process of recruiting were minimized.

Once participants were identified as student interns with recent internship experience, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. All the interviews were audio-taped and ranged between 40 minutes and 75 minutes, averaging 60 minutes. Semi-structured research questions were used in order to gain information on the *hows* and *whats* of students' internship experiences by asking student interns to share their stories and examples. The semi-structured interview format provided greater breath than other types of qualitative approaches, because guiding questions, such as "Could you describe the overall process of getting the internship from searching to recruitment?" functioned to "get into the setting," which allowed later interview questions to explore participant's understanding of the language and culture of their internship experience (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 707).

The first research question, "How do student interns experience the organizational assimilation process during the limited time period of the internship?" was explored by asking a

variety of semi-structured questions. For example, the researcher asked student interns to explain, “When and how much did you feel like you were part of the organization, and why?” and “How were your interactions and relationships with employers and peer interns?” The second research question, “How does information gained during the assimilation process influence participants’ conceptualization of organizational identity?” was explored through questions such as “Can you describe the organization’s key characteristics/atmosphere (using adjectives)?” and “How did the employers or coworkers talk about their company when talking to you or other interns? How did that affect your thoughts about the organization?” (See Appendix B for a full listing of the interview questions).

Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher reviewed the interview recordings extensively and transcribed the data, resulting in a total of 377 double-spaced pages of interview text. In order to interpret the student interns’ narratives, the research began by listening carefully to the “narrator’s voices and stories, thereby extending the narrator-listener relationship and the active work of listening into the interpretive process” (Chase, 2005, p. 663). To accomplish this, the researcher read through the entire set of interview transcripts as a whole, rather than trying to locate themes from the beginning. Then, thematic analysis was conducted in order to help find and organize emerging themes. McNeese-Smith (1999) explains that this method was originally used for analyzing texts, but in order to understand human behaviors within various contexts, researchers have been applying this method to transcribed verbal reports and interviews. While reading the interview transcripts, the researcher engaged in line-by-line open-coding by carefully reading each line of text, using one or two words to describe what the line represents, and separating the coded data into categories (McNeese-Smith, 1999). Following line-by-line coding,



the data were sorted in broad and general categories such as “beginning of the internship,” “during the internship,” and “ending the internship.”

Once the data were organized in broad categories, the researcher divided the larger categories into smaller groupings to identify the specific factors that represented and influenced each stage in the organizational assimilation process and informed organizational identity. In doing so, attention was paid to narrower and more specific concepts which are subsets within each broader category; for instance, if “being far away from other interns” was mentioned and influenced student assimilation during their internship, a new sub-category entitled “physical proximity” was created under the category of “during the internship.” Also, in the category “during the internship,” when students showed higher levels of assimilation such as earning more responsibilities or negotiating their roles, the information was separated into “encounter” and “metamorphosis” categories as appropriate.

In order to effectively organize the themes and categories, memos were written throughout the coding process. Memo writing is helpful for open-coding to reflect on the emerging themes pertaining to the primary research questions, providing “the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). This process of memo writing, which is defined as writing informal analytical notes while coding data, helps researchers stay involved in the data analysis and increases the level of abstraction of ideas throughout the coding process (Malvini Redden, 2012). Throughout the coding and memo writing process, participants’ original quotes were included to honor student’s voices and stay true to the raw data, instead of summarizing experiences. Patton (2002) explains, “Direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing respondents’ depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their

experiences, and their basic perceptions” (p. 21). Patton further explains that a qualitative researcher’s role is to provide a framework within which people can express their point of view about the topic accurately and thoroughly. To do so, raw data was included in organizing the memos. The memo data consisted of 54 single space pages of notes that included analysis and supporting quotations of the predominant themes represented in the data. The following chapter reveals findings and discusses limitations as well as implications.

## Chapter 4 - Findings

As previously discussed, internships are important for students, academic institutions, and organizations. While internship stage models increase understanding of the experiences interns have by providing general events and emotions that are common to each internship stage (Inkster & Ross, 1993; Kiser, 2000; Sweitzer & King, 1994, 1995), the internship models do not account for students' socialization processes within organizational settings. This study examines the intersections of internship stage models and organizational assimilation processes to better understand student experiences. Internships frequently represent the first professional work experience students have, providing them with an important opportunity to learn about organizational behavior and communication expectations. This study captures students' unique experiences and circumstances that influence assimilation into host organizations.

Further, as internships progress, student interns gain an internal member view of host organizations. Unlike organizational image or reputation, organizational identity is a concept that organizations use in order to describe themselves (Albert & Whetten, 1985). This study hypothesizes that as a student intern assimilates into a host organization and gains an understanding of the organization's key characteristics through experiences as an internal member, his/her perception of the host organization's identity influences assimilation. Thus, this study examines how student interns perceive their host organizations' identity and its influence on their level of assimilation.

The following section reveals this study's findings through thematic analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts. First, students' experiences in each stage of organizational assimilation are categorized by similar emerging themes and described through participant narratives. As will be further discussed below, even though individuals' internship experiences

are specific to the student, factors that influence the process of assimilation within different organizational settings are similar. After discussing organizational assimilation corresponding with internship models, participants' perceptions of internship host organizations' identities will be discussed.

### **Organizational Assimilation Corresponding with Internship Models**

The first research question asks, "How do student interns experience the organizational assimilation process during the limited time period of their internship?" Findings confirm that student interns experience many of the stages indicated in Jablin's (1987) organizational assimilation theory, although a majority of participants did not reach the metamorphosis stage. In order to explore student interns' assimilation experiences and the relationship of these experiences to existing internship models, findings are presented in the following order: anticipatory socialization, encounter, metamorphosis, and exit.

#### ***Anticipatory Socialization***

Anticipatory socialization is the first stage to becoming an organizational member through making intentional or unintentional efforts to learn about an organization (Jablin, 1987). As will be further discussed in this section, students indicated efforts to gain information prior to becoming active members through the process of deciding to participate in an internship, searching for a host organization, and developing expectations about the internship. Student interviews confirmed that internships begin with anticipatory socialization processes, paralleling the research on anticipatory socialization for full-time employment (Jablin, 1987). Further, anticipatory socialization may be even more critical for students because they often do not have professional work experiences to help them form appropriate expectations for the internship.

However, existing internship stage models do not account for this process and should be extended to explain how prior experiences influence student internships.

Participants' stories were separated into two types of anticipatory socialization – vocational and organizational anticipatory socialization. The following explains influences on students' general information seeking in regards to vocational anticipatory socialization. Then, students' organizational anticipatory socialization is discussed in terms of how students learned about the specific host organizations for which they wish to intern through direct communication with recruiters and the uncertainty experienced because of limited information and remaining uncertainties.

### ***Vocational Anticipatory Socialization***

Through vocational anticipatory socialization, individuals learn about jobs in general before deciding what specific jobs they are looking for (Jablin, 1987). This study confirms student interns desire to explore vocations prior to deciding on a future career. Indeed, before participants even began considering doing an internship or actively searching for internship positions, they indicated two main sources of influence: family members and academic advisors/instructors. Since not all students are familiar with internships, the interview participants explained that they specifically sought out vocational anticipatory socialization information pertaining to internships. This vocational internship information was necessary for them to understand what an internship entailed and how an internship may benefit them.

Not surprisingly, family members were identified as a common source for initial information, particularly in terms of encouraging students to participate in internships. Existing internship stage models could be enhanced by including family members as an important

information source for interns. For example, Garrett explained how he initially heard about his real estate internship that he obtained through family connections and encouragement:

My mom...she teaches at a state university, and she had said to me about internships and mentioned her real estate agent who helped her buy our house... my brother had done it, my sister had done it. They had different majors, but they said that an internship would be great and it would give me a lot of experience to go forward.

Garrett attributed his decision to participate in an internship largely to his mother's influence, noting his mother as a credible source (an academic professor) and his siblings' previous internship experiences. Garrett added that, until his senior year, he played basketball for his school and wanted to become a coach, as all the other players did, without putting a lot of thought into other career choices. However, his career plan changed to becoming a real estate agent based on his conversations with his mother. He eventually obtained contact information for his mother's real estate agent, and secured an internship position at the agent's office.

Vocational anticipatory socialization through family members, as in Garrett's case, provided a powerful influence which not only affects students' decisions to complete an internship but also impacts their career plan. Students may be more receptive to vocational socialization through family members because they perceive them as trustworthy sources.

Further, family opinions were noted as an important consideration in completing an internship in order to meet family members' expectations. Garrett noted that, since his mother maintained a good relationship with the agent, he did not want to disappoint both the employers and his mother; this concern was one of the reasons he tried to make positive impressions throughout the internship by doing his best at every task he was given. Another participant,

Jessa, also explained that she felt as if the recruiters had high expectations because she knew them through her family connection. Jessa found out about an internship opportunity at a CPA firm through her parents' close friends who used to be their neighbors. She said:

When I started college, our old neighbors told my parents, "Hey, I know Jessa is in accounting, and if she is ever looking for an internship, let me know. I will pass her name along." So that's kind of how that happened.

Even though Jessa explained that doing an internship was part of a "five-year master plan" to become a CPA, the idea of participating in an internship and information regarding which organization to consider came from her family's personal connection.

Family members as sources of vocational anticipatory socialization are influential, yet students may become passive recipients of given information, instead of actively and intentionally searching for information regarding an internship. Martin, who interned at a financial services firm for which his father was working as a full-time financial advisor, admitted that getting information about an internship through his father was the easiest way, but it was not the best way to learn how to search for jobs:

It is the easiest way to do it. But personally for me, going out and finding companies where you haven't had experience with teaches you more about how to interact with other people, which, depending on the job, makes you look better.

Martin's explanation is important in that he recognizes the skills gained from actively seeking information beyond his family. Vocational anticipatory socialization may be more effective and rewarding in the long term when students actively search for reasons to do an internship, understand how the internship will benefit and develop their career, and learn where/how to search for internship positions. However, if students are not informed about internships at all,

family members can be trustworthy sources of information and provide the easiest access to internships.

While six of the 13 participants spoke specifically about relying on family influence to learn about and obtain internships, this often resulted in a formal recruiting process including interviewing. For example, Ally initially learned about her internship through her pastor who was a friend of her father; however, she added that gaining the internship was not just an “easy” process because still she had to send her resume and do interviews. In fact, applicants whose vocational anticipatory socialization was influenced by their family members frequently described themselves as independent individuals who did not solely rely on their family members.

For example, Kristin and Jason, whose family members were working for the same organization which they interned with, emphasized that their family members were not involved in the recruiting process. Students may use and trust family members as sources of *vocational* anticipatory socialization, but once they enter *organizational* anticipatory socialization, which is learning specifically about the internship host organizations, they attempt to disconnect themselves from their family members. This may suggest that while family members influence and provide important information initially, as students begin to actively seek internships they distance themselves from their family to be seen as independent. Students indicated awareness that relying solely on family members is not the only way to gain vocational anticipatory socialization information.

Second, students’ academic advisors and instructors played significant roles in guiding students through their vocational anticipatory socialization and helping students understand how



to approach internships. Lisa was advised to apply for an internship by her major advisor. She recalled:

Dr. Louise was my advisor, and I told her that I want to get an internship just to see what it was like and to get a feel, and I guess one of her previous students had done one at the local United Way office. So I got the name of the person who works at the office through Dr. Louise, and I just emailed him and went in for an interview.

Lisa's vocational anticipatory socialization was more intentional and active than Garrett's because she approached her advisor first with a clear goal to learn about internship rather than being given the idea of doing an internship from a family member. However, the only information Lisa received from her advisor was contact information for an organization for which the advisor's former student interned. Even though academic advisors can be a less biased source of vocational anticipatory socialization for internships compared to family members, Lisa still did not learn whether/how an internship at the organization would provide development for her future career or how to search for organizations that would have the right fit for her. In this particular case, Lisa found that the internship was not the right program for her career and she was disappointed with her first internship experience. Therefore, although the instructor provided some helpful vocational anticipatory socialization, the information was not sufficient to guarantee a positive experience.

By contrast, Hannah's academic advisor taught her "how to approach" searching for internships, which contributed to successful vocational anticipatory socialization. Hannah said:

This method was introduced by Dr. Lee. I Googled "small consulting businesses in Kansas City"... I came up with three to four, I researched them, looked at their

website, clientele and mission statement and values...I then graded them one to four...the internship I did was actually my second choice...then I went ahead and sent out my resume to the first three, and I got a few calls back from them.

Through the searching method instructed by her advisor, Hannah was able to make an informed effort to find internships that would be a good fit for her and provide her with specific skills she wanted to learn. In this case, Hannah was an active participant in gaining information and her academic advisor provided her with a method for learning about internship possibilities, rather than sending her to one place. Hannah's vocational anticipatory socialization did not only teach her about how to approach internships, but also how to search for full-time jobs.

Academic advisors and instructors also can provide more information for students' vocational anticipatory socialization through preparing students for career fairs. Jason explained:

I was in Professional Interviewing class, and we had to make a resume. I never had to make a resume before so that was kind of cool. The plan was to go to a Career Fair Day, and I would have never gone if I didn't go to that class. If I hadn't gone and taken that class I probably wouldn't have gotten the internship or the job. So I am really thankful for that.

As Jason explained, the instructor was a great source for vocational anticipatory socialization because the instructor provided guidance about the process of obtaining an internship, rather than directing students toward a specific internship. Jason added that after they finished writing their resumes, the class looked at the list of organizations that participated in the career fair and the instructor helped the students research the organizations that students were interested in learning more about. These student experiences demonstrate that instructors or academic advisors can provide a helpful source for vocational anticipatory socialization by teaching/motivating students

to learn about which organizations are a good fit and how to search for internship positions independently.

### ***Organizational Anticipatory Socialization***

While vocational anticipatory socialization focuses on gaining information on jobs in general, organizational anticipatory socialization occurs when students learn and develop expectations specifically about the organizations for which they will be applying to or interning in (Jablin, 1987). Two sources of information include organizational literature, such as websites or job advertisement, and interpersonal interactions, such as conversations or correspondence with recruiters or other applicants (Jablin, 1987). The findings suggest that students utilize interactions more because of the limited information provided in organizational literature. In addition, this study identified another source of organizational anticipatory socialization: Learning about the host organization through directly observing and experiencing the physical workspace during the interview process.

Further, during organizational anticipatory socialization, even when there seemed to be enough information to develop clear expectations about host organizations, students dealt with more uncertainties than one may think. Internship stage models simply describe that students are “anticipating” new experiences and the anxiety is positively valenced, but this emotion was not always the case. The following sections are organized to explicate student interns’ organizational anticipatory socialization through (1) making direct interactions with recruiters, (2) experiencing workspace, and (3) dealing with uncertainties.

### ***Direct Interaction with Recruiters***

Students often failed to find enough information through organizational literature including host organizations’ websites or job advertisements, etc. A majority of participants

explained that they did not find internship or recruitment information on the host organizations' websites and had to call or email the organization to determine internship availability. Thus, many participants made direct contacts with recruiters and used interpersonal interactions for their organizational anticipatory socialization, which did not always go well. Noah explained his experience sending an email directly to the employer:

The website didn't have any information whatsoever. I just emailed the doctor, the doctor who was in charge of the laboratory in the zoo, just asking, "Hi, do you do internships?" And she said, "Yeah, tell me a little bit about yourself." And I wrote like, a paragraph, and she's like, "Yep, see you in May!" It was really bizarre, actually.

Noah indicated that he did not think this was a normal recruiting process. He may have expected the "normal" process would include resume screening and a formal interview before he could secure an internship position. Even though he directly communicated with the recruiter, the email correspondence did not help Noah receive enough information about the organization to understand what to expect in terms of the internship position. His email communication with the employer confused him and made him experience doubt and hesitation about the internship program.

Garrett also experienced a stressful situation when he sent an email to the employer, recalling:

I'll never forget that moment... I sent a long, nice email saying that I am excited to work for him and feel blessed to have this opportunity. And all he said was, "Great. We'll see you at an interview, then." And I thought, "What? Does this guy not like me or does he not want to do this?"

Garrett's first interaction with the employer did not go as he expected, therefore the interaction caused him to feel greater uncertainty and stress, rather than increasing his knowledge about the organization. It may be that, since Garrett has never interviewed before, he expected that the employer would be more receptive and write him an email that corresponded to his "long nice email."

One explanation for Noah and Garrett's perceptions that their communication was not successful may be a result of relying on email communication. Using computer-mediated communication may not be an effective way for students to develop proper expectations about internships and host organizations. Despite its convenience, phone interviews can offer more than email communication because students can ask questions and directly hear what employers can say about the internship position. Doing face-to-face interviews offers even more nonverbal information because, as will be discussed in the following section, it allows students to observe the workspace to learn about the working environment and organizational culture.

When students had direct, face-to-face communication with recruiters before they started their internships, the interaction positively influenced organizational anticipatory socialization by lowering uncertainties and allowing students to be part of mutual selection process. Seven out of 13 participants indicated that their face-to-face interview experience was helpful in terms of learning about the host organization's culture and employers' expectations. For example, Kristin's employer invited her to lunch for an interview and explained her internship responsibilities in the organization. Kristin said that she did not only feel welcomed, but also learned that the organization was going to be a relaxed and comfortable place to work. Jason was also invited to visit the office for an interview and recalled:

The manager said this is a chance for an internship, 12-week interview, and we are going to be interviewing you just as much as you are going to be interviewing us. He said, “We are not just looking at you and tearing you apart. We want you to look into us and ask, “Is this a company I can work for?” and if not, you need to find it out because we want you to be happy or at someplace else...this is your life and career, and we don’t want you to lie and say I’m up for relocating and moving for this job.”

Jason perceived the communication with the employer to be honest and straightforward, which allowed him to clearly understand the expectations for an intern in the organization and that he would be able to make an informed decision regarding organizational fit for future work. Jason explained that he did not only develop clear expectations, but got the impression that the organization valued their interns and took the internship program very seriously. This example demonstrates that clear, face-to-face interactions with employers during the interview process contributed to students’ successful organizational anticipatory socialization.

In a similar case, Hannah also learned a lot about the host organization when she went in for an interview. Hannah said:

It was not just them interviewing me, it’s me interviewing them. I asked myself, “Do I want to be part of their organization? Do I want to work for you? Do you stand for what you say you stand for?” That is one thing I would really search for and ask about, because I didn’t want to be in an organization that is not true to their values or mission.

Hannah's experience also demonstrates that directly interacting with employers before participating in an internship lowers uncertainties by allowing students to learn about the organization and determine if they are a good fit in the organization.

### ***Experiencing Workspace***

When describing their interview experiences based on face-to-face interactions, five of the 13 participants discussed the physical space and dress code they observed independently, without a prompting question. Specifically, students noted how these observations affected and often changed their initial expectations or impressions. Physical space and dress code, in addition to interpersonal interactions with employers, played a critical role in helping students develop expectations about the organizational culture before they began their internships.

Ally, who found her internship position through her pastor, explained her experience going into the non-profit organization's office for an interview for the first time:

I was thinking that the interview would be formal, but it wasn't...it was kind of a small organization...the environment itself was really relaxed, and they have couches everywhere, and that's what my interview was like...realistically, the building looks like a house...it used to be a model house for a real estate firm or something like that.

Ally's point was that her interview was very informal unlike she expected. While the relaxed, personal space and small organization size was unexpected, she felt relieved and indicated that the interview was nice. Her initial expectation that the interview was going to be formal could have stemmed from an expectation that all interviews are somewhat formal and professional.

Unlike Ally, whose nervousness was lowered to find out that not all interviews are formal and difficult, two students reported excitement for being in a formal and professional setting for

the first time. For example, Jason, who went to a career fair to submit his application, said, “I never had a suit before...I went and bought a suit to go to the career fair, and it was exciting!” During Jason’s internship, he actually did not wear suits except during the orientation/training week, but he said being in a suit made him feel like “a grown up.” In addition, the “giant conference room” he sat in for orientation was “impressive” and even “intimidating.” He explained that the company just had an expansion in their corporate office, and having an opportunity to be sitting there as an intern made him feel “like we were highly sought out after recruits.”

Monte also paid attention to the physical space and dress code during his interview. The insurance company for which he interned required an online application process including several tests. After he passed the tests, he had a phone interview, and then he had an opportunity to talk with one of the supervisors regarding how to prepare for a face-to-face interview. That is, he had several direct opportunities, compared to Ally and Jason’s experiences, to form expectations before actually going into the office to interview. When Monte went to the insurance company’s building for the first time, he explained:

I definitely thought it was going to be more laid-back than regular companies, because they told me it was... They said the dress code is slacks and polo...no suits and ties...they play it pretty lax on the dress code. So I knew I was going to go into more comfortable atmosphere... [As I was waiting in the hallway when I went for the interview with my supervisor] I kept hearing ping pong balls going back and forth. I was like, "What is going on? Are they playing ping pong here?" [laugh]...So definitely they made me feel like the place was going to be very chill.



Monte had several opportunities to form expectations before his interview throughout the application process (completing online application, a phone interview, a phone call informing about the final interview), allowing him to understand that the organization had an informal environment, but he was still surprised to find out that the workplace was even more casual than expected. This surprise, however, was a positive one because it made him more excited to work in the relaxed environment.

In addition, Monte provided more description of the building that changed his initial thoughts about insurance companies in general:

The foyer was really nice, like apple computers are there, and it was very design-y...I was expecting something mathematical, just like law firms maybe...but they had a lot of interesting art in their too...it was a very nice working condition.

Even though his initial expectation about the environment was met – “relaxed and chill” – he still had generalized ideas that firms dealing with law and policies would be somewhat “hard” and “boring” in terms of the design or setting of the office. For Monte, physical space during the interview process was really impactful in a way that reinforced his initial expectations and corrected wrong images he had in a positive way.

Similar to Monte’s case, Erin also paid close attention to the physical space and attire and her expectations were completely changed after being in the office for her interview. Erin describes:

I showed up, and everything in the lobby is really clean and pristine, and I was thinking, “This is really scary; I am not going to get this [laugh].”...you go upstairs and wait to be buzzed, and it’s just very clean...I remember specifically that there are mints on the front desk, and I really wanted one but I thought, “I am

not going to take one because I am not good enough for one of those mints [laughs].”...I was just very, very nervous...and when they called me in, all of a sudden things changed dramatically...from the main lobby they had crazy road signs everywhere, like a Scooby Doo and a Wizard of OZ...I was thinking, “What is going on?” and then we get to her office, there were more craziness such as lit up posters [laughs].

Before Erin went into the main office in which she was going to be working, she only saw the front desk and lobby, and she was so overwhelmed and intimidated by the neat and clean front space that she lost her confidence. She strongly believed that she would not get the internship position because “it was too good to be true.” Erin expected a formal and professional workspace, explaining that she intentionally dressed in formal business casual, but the front desk felt more rigid than what she originally expected. However, once she noticed that the main office had a very relaxed atmosphere when she observed the posters and characters in the lobby, she realized that she was completely overdressed. Based on these first interview stories, interns’ perceptions of the organizations’ physical workspace and member attire during the interview process influenced students’ organizational anticipatory socialization by providing important cues for what the organizational culture was like and setting the tone for internship expectations.

### ***Dealing with Uncertainties***

The existing internship stage models do not account for how students’ higher level of uncertainty can cause negative emotions for students before they start an internship. Sweitzer and King’s (1994) internship model does discuss that students feel anxious due to some uncertainties but explains that the anxiety is positive because interns are anticipating something they have not experienced before. However, many participants expressed stress, nervousness, and frustrations

during the anticipatory socialization stage due to uncertainties regarding various issues. This section introduces participants' stories that exemplify the types of uncertainties that contribute to students' negative emotions.

First, compensation issues were discussed as a cause of uncertainty influencing students' organizational anticipatory socialization negatively and perpetuating throughout the course of the internships. Four of 13 participants' completed unpaid internships programs, and they experienced difficulties dealing with negotiating payments during the application and interviewing process. Garrett, who interned for his mother's real estate agent, worked for 30 to 40 hours per week without getting paid, explaining that if there was one thing he would change about his internship (because everything else was great), it would be asking his employers about receiving compensation for his work during his interview. Garrett described:

When my mom called him and asked, "Would you ever pay an intern?" he answered, "Yeah, of course."...that's kind of what was lost in translation during my interview... I really wanted the internship; I really wanted to be there...I wanted it so bad that I didn't want to go in and push buttons, like, "Take me. Now pay me!"...It would have been nice if they paid me, maybe send a check in the mail after the internship, but they didn't.

Garrett added that he did not want to be seen as a student who wanted the internship for money. However, because he had heard from his mother that the employer was willing to pay, he had an impression that the employer might bring it up during the interview or pay him later once the internship was completed. Not negotiating compensation left him with feelings of uncertainty that he carried throughout the internship (hoping that they might send him a check), and later regret at the conclusion of the internship when no compensation was provided. Garrett

mentioned that he had some days when he felt, “Oh goodness, I’ve got to go work nine hours today, unpaid.”

Garrett’s testimony shows that students can experience tensions in understanding the purposes of internships between earning incomes and having a learning opportunity. Because Garrett participated in a summer internship, which is a time many students take part-time jobs to make money, he thought that it would be desirable to be paid while working as an intern. However, since students are working in the internship for experience at the expense of the employers’ efforts, students may be concerned and uncertain about how much their work is worth for the organization and if it is appropriate to be compensated. Also, since students have not negotiated salary before, they may be struggling to bring the topic up in conversation with employers without appearing greedy.

Lisa was also an unpaid intern at a nonprofit organization and shared:

I knew that I wasn’t going to be paid, but the supervisor had mentioned, “Maybe I will help you pay for credit hours if you’re taking a class.” That kind of didn’t pan out because we were going to decide when I leave, but he was gone the last day I worked there, so we never got to talk about that...that was a downside.

Even though Lisa knew that her internship was unpaid, the employer briefly mentioned the possibility for her to be compensated in another way in the beginning of her internship. The implied promise created uncertainties and even disappointed her because she got the impression that the employer was trying to “avoid” talking about compensation at the end of the internship.

These examples demonstrate the importance of clearly discussing payment issues before students start their internship during the organizational anticipatory socialization stage. As mentioned earlier, since students do not have skills to bring the payment issue up during

interview conversations, it is reasonable to argue that recruiters are responsible to present clear terms of employment. Also, family members and advisors who guide students for their internship process should help prospective interns to establish work conditions prior to making the decisions to take the position.

Academic curriculum provided another type of uncertainty for student interns. Jessa, who interned at an accounting firm right after her sophomore year, explained:

There was concern of- in the real world, you use a lot of computers. And in class, we really break it down to formulas [how they work and how we use them]. So I was worried that when I come back to classroom after internship, I will find the classes pointless since I will already have learned how to do all of it at the organization.

Jessa added that it is rare for a sophomore to do an internship in such an early stage of the academic curriculum; she had only taken one accounting class at that point. Although she felt privileged to have an opportunity to work at an accounting firm before her peers, she was worried that she would feel disconnected from her future classes before she even began her internship. The concerns were complicated because she did not have an advisor before or after her internship to provide advice. Furthermore, her employer did not communicate regarding any expectations or learning outcomes for the internship, so she relied on her existing broad ideas about “using computers.” Vague information regarding how the internship would impact her coursework created doubts and concerns about her future classes, lowering her motivation to participate in the internship. For students who are uncertain about their majors and who are early in their academic curriculums, early internship experience may cause confusion, concerns, and doubts about their future.

Third, conflicts between perceived organizational values and personal values provided an additional experience of uncertainty. Erin recalled the time when she was applying for the internship at a major radio station:

I was nervous... my family is religious...the one I really wanted to intern for was a rock station...I remember talking to my parents a lot and just praying a lot, like, if God wants me to be here... I know that you can't rely on God, but... my dad was very concerned about my internship, which was understandable.

Erin described herself as a Christian like her parents, but she wanted to try new things, because she felt she was very “sheltered” as she grew up in a religious family. Erin’s initial excitement about the internship turned to nervousness and uncertainty, when she told her parents about it and they responded that they were concerned about her going into such a secular working environment. Even though she did not specifically mention it to her parents when she started looking for an internship, she said that she had an alternative plan to work for a Christian organization in case she ended up not going to intern for the radio station. She had more concerns and doubts than excitement or anticipation about her internship. Although this was the only case among participants’ testimonies that dealt with conflicting family religious values and perceived organizational values, the example illustrates that negative emotions can be caused by various types of uncertainties concerning more than simply “anticipating” an internship.

Fourth, the level of uncertainty was heightened when students did not know the amount of responsibility and the type of work they would be performing. In reverse, when students knew exactly what they would be doing and information about their work environment and organizational members, students were able to develop accurate expectations and feel motivated and excited about their internship during their organizational anticipatory socialization stage.

Kristin, at the time of her interview, had finished her first internship at an engineering firm and was waiting to start another internship at a small event planning office. Kristin said:

She [the recruiter] told me that I will be the only one in charge of HR. She will oversee my work, but she won't be looking over my stuff...So she's going to train me basic things, of course, but she's going to throw me there to get started, which I am excited for it!

Kristin's conversation with the recruiter was more detailed and specific in terms of the scope of tasks compared to what other internship participants heard, because the recruiter told her exactly what to expect and what would happen once she started her internship. Kristin was mainly excited about being in charge of specific responsibilities and working independently in the workplace. However, had she not had this conversation about her job responsibilities with the recruiter before she began the internship, the situation would have been more uncertain.

Another example came from Jenny, who interned at a non-profit research institute and experienced a reverse situation from Kristin's. Jenny recalled:

I did not know how much responsibility I'd hold within the organization, how much value they had in their students, and how much work interns did for them. I didn't realize they'd give me such hands-on experiences.

Jenny's initial idea of her role as an "intern" was to help the staff with simple tasks and not be valued as a member of the organization. If Jenny had an open conversation with a recruiter or with her employer to learn the job expectations before she began her internship, her attitude, preparedness, and feelings toward the internship would have been more positive. Sharing information was prompted by student questions, as well as offered by organizational members

who made efforts to provide as much accurate information as possible before the internship program began.

Lastly, some participants who moved far away to different states for their internships expressed higher levels of uncertainty about living situations and the people they would be working with. For students who spent a whole summer in a new place, living with unfamiliar people and working in a different environment, more effort was required from both parties – students and host organizations – for successful anticipatory socialization. Jason talked about when 24 students were recruited for a large manufacturing organization’s summer internship:

We had a Facebook group page even before we started the internship. Clair, the recruiter, wanted me to start a 2012 intern group so we can acquaint before we even went up to the internship, and everyone was excited. You could even find out who your roommates were going to be, so it wasn’t so awkward when we met for the first time.

Jason’s host organization had summer internship programs in the past and found that creating a Facebook group page was useful for interns’ initial socialization. Using such a tool for students’ organizational anticipatory socialization would be helpful for organizations with a large group of student interns, especially in instances where interns lived in locations across the country.

Monte, who interned for Jones Insurance, also mentioned that the interns voluntarily created a Facebook page for socialization among the 10 interns. In this case the students took initiative to use technology to learn more about fellow interns after the internships had already started, when interns were already familiar with each other. Jason and Monte’s examples show that utilizing social media did not only contribute to students’ initial socialization before the



internships by lowering uncertainties but, also assisted with socialization throughout the course of internships.

### ***Encounter***

The encounter stage begins when newcomers enter and become acquainted with the new organization and includes two interrelated processes – socialization and individualization (Jablin, 1987). Socialization occurs through organizational member's influence and efforts to change newcomers to meet organizational needs, whereas individualization takes place when newcomers attempt to change the organization to meet their needs (Jablin, 1987).

For students, the internship encounter phase is often their first professional work experience in an organizational setting; therefore, it can be difficult for students to create and individualize their roles and responsibilities. Socialization may be the only way for student interns to assimilate into an organization effectively due to lack of professional organizational experience. Student interns may be more readily adaptive for socialization that is provided by the host organization since they cannot compare organizational practices and cultures with other experiences. Throughout this study, participants' experiences in the encounter stage encompassed training/orientation, interaction with other organizational members, and their personalities/work styles and influenced their assimilation processes.

### ***Training/Orientation***

Learning and adapting to a new organization while trying to lower uncertainty can be overwhelming for interns, with five out of 13 participants noting that training and orientation provided by the host organizations was helpful. Even though existing literature mentions that organizations may or may not provide trainings (i.e. Cook, et al., 2004; Kiser, 2000), findings indicate that the sharing of organizational information positively influences student interns'

assimilation. Since participants' internship experiences differed across organizations, the trainings/orientations also varied in types and amounts of time spent, ranging from no training to two and a half week-long class. One of the more extensive training programs was described by Monte in the insurance field. He was trained with nine other interns in a classroom setting, and explained:

They brought down a trainer for us, and he stayed in a hotel for more than two weeks. We learned about insurance policy and construction ... This gave us ideas of what the job would be like, what other employees know. It was really good.

Monte's training helped him gain practical knowledge about the job, and also impressed him as he recalled the company's effort, time, and money spent on training interns. Since Monte's training provided a good experience, it also positively shaped his assimilation during the encounter stage. Trainings that included clear guidelines to perform the job effectively contributed to successful *socialization*, helping new interns perform well and feel a part of the organization. Monte explained that the training was exactly the same for full-time newcomers who take part in seven weeks of training, but due to the limited time, the interns' training was more intense and condensed.

Jason's experience also supported the finding that extensive and successful training/orientation at the beginning of an internship contributes to successful assimilation. Jason described that his orientation was impressive, including participating in a professional photo shoot and touring the entire manufacturing plant. Jason indicated that he felt like a full member of the organization and its community as his internship progressed, in part due to this training.

Further, socializing with other organizational members through orientation/training was also mentioned to be effective in successful assimilation. Monte went on to explain that he

enjoyed getting to know more people in the organization, especially when higher management executives visited several of the training classes to introduce themselves to interns. In a similar case, Jason also experienced extensive training/orientation where the organization invited mentors to interact with the new interns:

Basically, they (mentors) were all sitting there like, “Yeah I worked here for this long.”...and you can ask them anything. One guy was like “Yeah I screwed up, cost the company, and had to throw something that was bad, which was \$3,000., but it’s okay to make mistakes because I’m still here; just don’t make them again.”

According to Jason, the host organization invited previous interns, who are now full-time employees, to help socialize new interns and talk about the organization in a relaxed conversational environment. Hearing narratives from old interns motivated new interns, helping them feel comfortable and reducing uncertainty.

Hannah, who interned at a small consulting firm, also heard narratives that helped her assimilate into the organization. Since Hannah was the first intern the organization ever hired, she relied on information and stories directly from her boss. In particular, Hannah recalled a story about a secretary who was about to get fired, including all of the secretary’s misbehaviors such as taking advantage of friendship with other employees. Hannah also learned about what the firm was planning on doing before and after firing the secretary. Since Hannah was trained by the secretary in the beginning and knew exactly what was going on (that the secretary would be fired soon and replaced by Hannah), she was able to better understand the situation and quickly learn the necessary tasks. Organizational narratives, in addition to formal training/orientation, helped interns lower uncertainties and adapt to the organizational culture.

Interestingly, positive training experiences did not guarantee successful assimilation with the internship. For example, although largely dissatisfied with her internship, Jessa explained that the training was one positive aspect from her experience. She shared, “We were all sitting in a big conference room, learned about main software and did some case studies...we also had the founder and the CEO talk to us about their cultural values. That part was fun and interesting.” Her training was similar to Monte and Jason’s and included informative sessions and introductions of some of the higher executives. Therefore, providing formal training sessions including informative and socializing events can be beneficial for initial assimilation, but it is not the only factor that determines successful assimilation throughout the entire internship

Positive training experiences are in direct contrast to the disappointment noted by interns who did not have formal training. Garrett, an intern at a real estate agent, recalled:

I was expecting that he’s going to come in, explain it, give me a PowerPoint presentation, but he didn’t...The hardest thing for me was to figure out how to transfer a dang call, and I didn’t figure that out until the last two weeks...They didn’t teach me. I would do it, but I couldn’t do it every time. I’m like, “gosh dang it.” I wish I would have known. It was not easy...

Garrett mentioned that he always tried to learn anything he could in the office, because he planned to have a career as an agent in the future. His first day was not what he expected in terms of training. Garrett described how he walked in to the office on the first day and was given a pile of data to organize all day long, instead of a presentation that introduced him to the real estate world and his role as an intern. Throughout the research interview, Garrett expressed a high level of frustration, especially as he explained the times he failed to answer and transfer phone calls. Had there been someone who taught him how to use the phone properly in the

beginning of the internship, he would not have struggled throughout the internship to figure it out by himself. In sum, Garrett's expectation that he would be introduced to the organization and trained in a formal setting was not met and caused disappointment.

Perhaps, student interns who do not have professional organizational experience expect their jobs to be somewhat similar to a classroom setting in which instructors provide course objectives, assignments, and learning outcomes; classroom learning likely influences student interns' anticipatory socialization. Those who had previous work experience in an organizational setting may not have been as surprised as Garrett was under the same circumstances. Thus, students may have an expectation that they will be socialized through training. As previously explained, socialization occurs through organizational member's influence and efforts to change newcomers to meet organizational needs, whereas individualization takes place when newcomers attempt to change the organization to meet their needs (Jablin, 1987). Findings indicated that when interns experienced individualization and were forced to take initiative to learn about their job, it created frustration and confusion due to a discrepancy between student interns' initial expectation and reality.

One participant, Jenny, described how time working at an organization can make a difference. Jenny has been a long-term intern for two years at a nonprofit research institute. Even though she was confident at the time of the interview, she explained that the field was very new to her when she first started her internship. She did not have a problem with accomplishing what she was asked to do, unlike Garrett's case, but she did not grasp the "big picture" of what the organization was about and the reasoning behind the work. Jenny recalled:

There was no training or anything... For a long time, I didn't even know if I fully understood their goal... If they had training, it would at least give us starting base,

instead of just having us figure out things. Not having training leaves a big uncertainty throughout the internship; I wouldn't know what exactly I was doing, so I had to ask the right questions, try to find information that I need and what I need to do to fill my time.

Fortunately, Jenny was good at communicating directly with the employers to learn what she needed to learn, but as she explained, there was always uncertainty about what she needed to do and why she was doing certain tasks; these comments highlighted her discomfort with individualization of her internship.

Lack of training was especially difficult for interns whose responsibilities were different from day to day. Interns explained that not knowing their purpose frustrated them as they had to think of ways to spend their time productively. For example, Lisa, who interned at a nonprofit organization's local office, felt that her boss did not assign her enough work to do. She said, "I would be sitting there trying to look busy." Based on the collection of the interns' accounts, while the presence of training was beneficial, the absence of training was problematic. Therefore, formal training, orientation to the organization, introduction to organizational members, and directions regarding interns' responsibility provided important information in the beginning of the assimilation process.

It is important to note that organizational type and size has a bearing on resources available to companies in terms of providing training. Where Monte, Jason, and Jessa interned in large, structured organization with more than 10 new interns at once, Garrett, Jenny, and Lisa interned in smaller offices in which only one or less than five interns worked. Some may argue that it is not necessary and meaningful for smaller organizations to provide training for one or two interns, especially considering the time and cost required; yet, as seen from students'

testimonies, even in a smaller organizational setting, it is critical for student interns to start with enough information and proper introduction in order to perform their role efficiently and feel that they are an important part of the organization.

### ***Interaction with Organizational Members***

Newcomers learn what is “normal” in terms of norms and incumbents in the encounter stage, and interactions with coworkers are very important (Jablin, 1987). Specifically, one of newcomers’ major concerns is to be accepted by other members before they can feel confident at their job (Feldman, 1977). The findings show that this is true for student interns as well; interaction with organizational members was critical for receiving feedback and feeling accepted and supported. Two subcategories of factors affecting new interns’ assimilation in terms of interaction with other organizational members were found: (1) proximity to peer interns and emotional support and (2) incumbents’ or supervisors’ influence. Interns indicated a desire to gain acceptance and encouragement from other members, suggesting that interaction is part of new interns’ *socialization* process rather than *individualization*.

### ***Physical Proximity and Peer Interns’ Influence***

First, physical proximity to other interns influenced new interns’ assimilation, where sitting close to other interns increased communication and interaction among peers, reducing uncertainties and enhancing socialization experiences. Questions regarding proximity were not asked during the interview; however, participants spontaneously indicated that their work space, the location of their desk, and proximity to other interns or employees had a bearing on how they experienced the encounter stage during their internship. Many participants’ stories about when they began their internship included proximity to others as a prominent influence of their assimilation.

While the training Jessa received was positive, she failed to assimilate into her host organization in part due to her frustration stemming from her workspace:

Training was the only time I saw other interns...they were on the other side of the office doing completely different projects...I would be sitting in this CUBE all day long without any interaction! I just gave this cube the most negative connotation because (in it) you are working by yourself, working on boring things...

Jessa's description shows two different ways to address the importance of workspace: proximity to other members and who the other members are. When Jessa explained her positive attitudes towards the training session the organization provided, she also described, "We were all sitting in a large conference room. It was nice that we are all in the same age..." But once she was put to work, she was given a desk in a cubicle that was far away from other interns, which made it difficult for her to interact with them. She did, however, say that there were several male incumbents whose cubicles were close to hers; however, this proximity did not help, because the tall cubicles were still separating them and she could not tell if they were there or if they had already left. Further, Jessa did not share common interests with the incumbents and indicated they had nothing to chat about. This demonstrates that both proximity to other members and member similarities, including age and job title, affects interns' assimilation. Therefore, placing new interns in close proximity promotes intern socialization.

Monte's internship experience confirms the importance of physical workspace as well. He described, "We were all in the same area, and we were all right next to each other all the time. We became really good friends." Further, Cora, whose work was mainly writing business reports independently sat close to three other interns and explained:



It was a really small firm...All the interns would sit around this table and do their own reports... it was a really friendly environment. And if you had any questions- like, I had a lot of questions so I asked other interns, "How do you do this?" or "Any helpful hints to get started on this research?"

Simply being close and able to ask questions to her peer interns helped Cora learn how to do her job quickly and accomplish tasks more efficiently. Similarly, Jenny, who was also working independently on a project during her internship, said, "We sometimes checked how each other are doing." This suggests, even if the given task is independent work, interns still benefited from close proximity to each other, since near physical location enabled questions and communication to reduce uncertainty. Even though the proximity may have been a coincidence in Cora's case, because it was a small office and there was not enough space to allocate interns' individual space, her location near other interns in the organization highlights the organizations role in the socialization process.

Jessa's host organization, on the other hand, had enough space and resources to locate interns in separate cubicles. Jessa's employer might have expected interns to enjoy having their own space, yet the space limited interaction among interns and led to failure of assimilation. These findings indicate a potential difference between student interns' perceptions of workspace and full-time members' expectations. Knight and Haslam (2010) report that full-time employees indicate a higher level of satisfaction and identification when they are given their own desks. However, this study found that interns benefited more from shared space and that having their own desks meant less than it might for full-time members. If Jessa's supervisors had known the importance of physical proximity for student interns and placed them in the same area in an open table instead of separate cubicles, her internship experience could have been more positive and

given her an opportunity to gain support from her peers. In sum, findings support existing research noting the importance of coworker interaction (Feldman, 1977; Jablin, 1987). Further, this study highlights the importance of physical proximity to peer interns in order to increase communication among peers and enhance socialization.

Besides placing interns near each other, some organizations also made efforts to provide social events that enhanced the development of workplace friendships. Monte and Jason worked in large, structured organization that had a many interns. Along with their host organizations' investment in training new interns, the organizations also provided opportunities to socialize interns, including preparing and paying for activities such as a cooking competition or dining out downtown. Monte indicated that his relationship with peer interns became very close, and Jason also said that he was never sitting by himself feeling lonely. Interns who did not have organizational support for social activities commented that they had to rely on limited interactions occurring occasionally during work hours, which was not always successful for developing workplace relationships.

While interaction with peer interns is important, it did not always bring positive effects. Peer interaction is an important factor that influences students' assimilation into their host organization, but can have either a positive or negative valence. For example, when a positive friendship was developed with other interns, this relationship enhanced intern assimilation; on the other hand, when an interaction with a peer intern did not go well, the negative encounters were detrimental for students' emotions and attitudes towards their internships.

Erin, who experienced conflict between her family and personal religious values and the host organization's values during the application process, faced situations in which she felt distanced from other interns occasionally:

There were some other interns that came in and turned on the radio, and for some reason, it was tuned to a Christian radio station, and one of the interns said, “Get that Jesus music off!” and I was like...[surprised and frustrated]”

Erin’s host organization also had a large group of interns which was similar to Monte and Jason’s experience; however, the organization was not willing to spend time or money to train or socialize new interns, putting them to work together only when it was necessary. When Erin described the situation, she obviously did not know who the other interns were, indicating there was no personal relationship among interns and they did not know or respect each other’s preferences. The interns who were making insensitive comments towards Christianity, were likely not aware that Erin was a Christian. Even though Erin shared that, looking back, it was a good experience to realize how different people are, she felt frustrated and distant from other interns. As Erin talked more about her overall internship, her level of assimilation into and identification with the host organization was low. This illustrates how interaction with peer interns can negatively impact students’ assimilation.

Negative interaction and failing to build good relationships with peer interns not only influenced students’ internship experience, but may also have a bearing on their career choices. Noah, who was pursuing a pre-veterinary major, said that he switched his major after interning at a zoo with other students who were also in the same major. He commented, “When I talked to a few interns at the zoo, they were going like, ‘I just like hug kitties and tigers, I just want to save things.’...I did not like the other people who were into that...there were a bunch of them going like that.” Before Noah had the interaction with other interns, he did not have negative attitude towards his major or his career plans; in fact, he explained that it was the second time he changed his major and he was excited to do the zoo internship. Once he started getting to know

other interns, Noah realized that other interns were there for different reasons, which seemed wrong to him. Not wanting to become “one of them,” Noah changed his major again after this internship to animal science and nutrition. Existing literature discusses that newcomers often become dissatisfied with their jobs because of their bosses who are insensitive towards them (Jablin, 1987; Katz, 1985). Noah’s testimony adds that peer interns can also be the cause of students’ dissatisfaction with their internships, which then influences their assimilation negatively.

Jessa also expressed frustration while describing interactions with peer interns. Besides having limited interaction with other interns after the training week, she also had an experience that made her feel uncomfortable. She described her first interaction with other interns:

You’d talk about what college you’re from (with other interns), just general introductions, and then they’re like, “Why are you from Kansas and you’re here.”...Since they are all from the same state, they’ll just be able to talk about, “Where did you go to high school?” They can relate that way. And mine was like, “We have similar campus events,” but then you sound kind of like you are bragging about your school. I don’t know... I didn’t know anyone there.... It was a lonely summer!

Jessa faced limitations during her initial interaction with peer interns because she was from a different state and attended a different school. Even though she liked having interns who were the same age, because her peer interns did not share space or initial similarities, it was difficult to form relationships. She felt distant from everyone and eventually stopped trying to become friends with other interns, which made her feel secluded and lonely throughout the internship. This was detrimental for her and she never experienced assimilation into the organization.

In Monte's internship, on the other hand, students from different schools and states became good friends in part because the organization provided social events and activities that encouraged them to get to know each other better outside of the office from the beginning. Differences in host organizations' socialization efforts impacted peer interns' interactions and opportunities to build relationships, highlighting the importance of peer interns' influence on students. Internship stage models, however, do not address the influence of peer interns at all. In fact, the encounter stage is described as "disillusionment" or "realizing differences between expectations and reality" (Inkster & Ross, 1993; Sweitzer & King, 1994, 1995), which refers to disappointing experiences due to the tasks interns are given, such as not having as much autonomy they were expecting. However, the findings suggest that a big part of the negative experience in the encounter stage stems from relational difficulties, specifically with peer interns. Further, to resolve the issues, host organizations have the ability to increase the amount of interactions among new interns, which generally had positive effects when there was enough exposure to peers and support from the organization.

### ***Indirect and Direct Socialization with Incumbents, Feedback, and Encouragement***

Feldman (1977) notes that interactions with coworkers are very important for full-time newcomers in terms of assimilation because they want to feel accepted. Similar to full-time newcomers' encounter experience, interactions with other organizational members were critical for short-term student interns as well. The internship stage models (Inkster & Ross, 1993; Kiser, 2000; Sweitzer & King, 1994, 1995), however, do not explain this important aspect about students' experiences; thus, it will be an important addition to the existing literature. Specifically, this section discusses the influence of incumbents and internship supervisors on interns through indirect and direct interactions, including feedback and encouragement. As students enter the

host organization and become surrounded by organizational members, interns are able to directly communicate and make observations of members to determine how to perform internship responsibilities. Since student interns are in the organization to learn, both indirect and direct communication with incumbents has bearing on their overall satisfaction and learning outcomes.

First, student interns' used indirect means to obtain information through observations and interpretations of incumbents' communication style, organizational culture, and work environment which influenced their assimilation process. Ally, who worked in a smaller office of a nonprofit organization, recalled:

The president of the organization loves food from Sonic, and he would always joke about that, saying, "Give me a Sonic drink."...I did not know what they were saying first, so I just laughed without knowing why they were laughing [Laughs]...And when they are talking about strange village names, I was like, "What are they talking about?" but then, once I worked on the pictures of the villages, I was like, "Oh, now I know what they were talking about." I don't think they recognized that I didn't understand what they were saying. I think they were just used to talking about those without explaining.

Ally experienced confusion in the beginning of her internship, because she simply did not understand what other members were referring to. Instead of asking questions, she pretended to understand what was going on. As Ally explained, organizational members that have not had interns before do not realize that interns can be confused due to lack of understanding of the organization's culture, environment, and members' relationships. Even though not understanding an inside joke does not cause as much confusions as not understanding task-related directions, Ally's assimilation could have been promoted if she was able to grasp internal members'

language and culture earlier. Even when interns were not directly talking with incumbents, they heard and observed the members' interaction and communication, which influenced assimilation.

Lisa also talked about what she learned indirectly from watching other employees communicating with each other:

You could tell – because there was a young girl, who was in charge of public relations, and she came right after college or something, so she was one of those who would play music in the background and want lively atmosphere. But one of the older ladies didn't like music, and everything had to be quiet, which was very dark and intense... And the boss was a very eccentric person and seemed to be scatter-brained... the workers would get annoyed with him...they work with him all the time and they know his tendencies and personalities, so you could tell when the tensions were starting to rise.

Lisa was the only intern in the small office with four other full-time members, and she learned a lot about incumbents through observing their verbal and non-verbal communication. Lisa realized other members' personalities, characteristics, and how they dealt with their boss, which then gave her ideas on how to behave.

Further, Erin, who interned at a radio station, explained what she learned indirectly about the organizational environment and other employees:

They are more social and outgoing than professional...they reminded me of nerds that grew up and became party animals...if you saw their offices, it'd feel like nerds because they have Simpson's and Scooby Doo everywhere... you do not feel disrespected though. You'd feel low because they'd treat us like friends...

Erin, prior to her internship experience, expected that all internships would be professional and that the office would reflect that professionalism. In noting her observations, Erin shared that her expectations were violated starting from the day she visited the office for her interview. As her internship progressed, she learned that the organizations' culture was relaxed and employees had "low mentality," meaning that they consider themselves younger and freer than traditional employees in professional organizational settings. Even though she did not express negative feelings toward the organization or the employees, she commented that "It was super interesting" and indicated she never felt a part of the group. She also said that she would see employees drinking constantly during or after some events and doing illegal drugs, which was a new and shocking experience for her. She explained that the employees provided a "comfortable" and "friendly" environment, but the internship clearly violated her expectations causing discomfort and uncertainty in terms of behavior expectations. During the internship, Erin maintained her conforming and adaptive attitude towards the organization and its members in order to deal with this disconnect she experienced. As a result of the internship experience, Erin's expectations for her future jobs changed, and now she believes that "it is completely different when it comes down to practice" rather than thinking that every job is done in a highly professional and formal atmosphere. Since participants changed their attitudes and expectations based on observations made throughout the internship, it is evident that indirect socialization through observing organizational culture and interactions had more bearing on students' assimilation than host organizations may realize.

As discussed earlier, student interns who do not have previous experience building work relationships in an organizational setting are more adaptive to socialization than individualization of their roles or responsibilities. Ally, Lisa, and Erin all experienced socialization that was not



intentionally planned by the host organization. While Erin did not conform to the behaviors of incumbents, she also did not individualize her role; instead, she found a way to co-exist with the current organizational practices for the short term of her internship.

Along with trainings, orientations, and social events that host organizations provided for newcomers' socialization, students actively took cues from observations about the organizational culture and environment which influenced assimilation. Newcomer's used of information-seeking behaviors that are discussed in existing literature on organizational assimilation theory as well (i.e., Fonner & Timmerman, 2008; Jablin, 1987, 2001). In fact, when formal trainings or introductions were absent, student interns indicated relying on observing the organization's culture, environment, and other members' communication styles for important cues that helped with assimilation. Unlike full-time newcomers who have the necessary skills that allow them latitude in negotiating their roles and positions (Hess, 1993), student interns relied on passive strategies such as observing, as opposed to active strategies including asking direct questions or interactive strategies such as applying different tactics to accomplish tasks.

Second, in addition to indirect socialization through observing incumbents' verbal and nonverbal communication, direct informal interactions with incumbents positively influenced student interns' assimilation process. When students realized that they could share casual and informal relationships with employers, they assimilated more rapidly into the organization and viewed the organizational culture positively. Kristin had overall very positive experiences with her internship, attributing her positive feelings to her successful assimilation. She explained:

They would (employers) let us take breaks in the afternoon, and we would take 15min break and play catch or talk, and even the bosses would come out for a little bit sometimes if they were free... People there were really friendly; if I had

questions they'd answer then and help me... They always include everyone for lunches and other social things, which was really nice... I enjoyed going, seeing them every day.

Kristin was surprised to see that employers would be willing to take time and socialize with other employees and an intern, because when she had previously visited her father who works in the same organization, the employees seemed "always serious and quiet." When her expectation was positively violated, she developed a good relationship with her employer and peers through various informal activities and communication and experienced high satisfaction and quick assimilation.

Monte's level of assimilation was positively influenced for similar reasons, including sharing informal and friendly interactions with the internal members. Monte recalled:

And they included us in everything; the manager was an awesome guy who would come and just hang out with us interns. He would walk around our cubicles, and say, "hey guys, what's up," even though he was the higher up, the manager of the whole department... It was fun going into work every day... They would always email us and tell us, "Oh my gosh. Thank you so much, you are helping us out a ton." And they would always email to tell us "Thank you for your work." Some were tedious work, no doubt, but you still get a sense that you are helping these people out, and they are good enough to tell us that too.

For Monte, similar to Kristin's experience, his internship was a very positive and fulfilling experience and assimilation was a smooth transition; Monte enjoyed being in the friendly environment with open-minded and appreciative employers. In other words, informal and friendly interactions with incumbents helped interns feel a part of the organization more quickly.

In addition to being included in various organizational activities, Monte was also surprised that the manager in such a high position would be willing to “hang out” with the college student interns. The socializing communication showed that the incumbents truly valued the interns and their work.

In both Kristin and Monte’s examples, they experienced both professional and friendly/comfortable interactions where the employers made a distinction between socializing casually and working. Kristin said that while they were sociable and friendly with each other, they also helped each other in terms of accomplishing tasks. Scholars note that, for full-time newcomers, it is often a dissatisfying experience when supervisors are not sensitive to the newcomers’ experience (Jablin, 1987; Katz, 1985). This is true for student interns as well. Kristin and Monte both expressed that their host organizations were thoughtful and sensitive to interns’ needs, which lowered their uncertainties and enhanced assimilation into the organization.

These positive informal experiences are in direct contrast to Erin’s earlier story about her observations, but low participation in informal interactions. In Erin’s internship, the organizational members maintained the relaxed and “low” or easygoing attitudes even when they were working on tasks. Erin’s employers did not treat new interns with caution or sensitivity as Monte and Kristen had experienced. Instead, Erin’s organizational leaders and members encouraged interns to drink alcohol, allowed the use illegal drugs during work hours, and swore frequently in the office, which contributed to her low identification with the organization and hindered the assimilation process. Granted, this disconnect is partially due to the differing values between Erin’s and the organization’s, but directly observing the employee’s differing behaviors

and attitudes in informal interactions reinforced Erin's realization of the disconnect and contributed to organizational assimilation difficulties.

Third, interns reported that the employers' direct feedback regarding work and displays of appreciation positively influenced interns' experience, making the completion of boring tasks manageable and even rewarding. Six of the 13 participants reported that it was motivating and encouraging to hear directly from their supervisors. As a result of direct supervisor interactions, interns explained that they felt that their opinions were valued and their work was done well. For example, Cora's main responsibility was writing business reports, and she received positive feedback when she submitted her first report to the supervisor. Cora said, "I worked really hard to write the best quality report, and in the end, the executive said that he was very satisfied with my work. So that was good." Similarly, Jenny enjoyed her internship overall and assimilated into her host organization well, mainly because the supervisor trusted the interns and gave them opportunities to voice their opinion on important projects. Jenny said, "Michelle just gave us the basic guideline, and it's open to anyone's ideas, no matter where you are, whether you are an intern or coordinator, they are willing to hear from all of you." Knowing that their opinions and work contributed to the host organization's success resulted in increased intern reports of organizational assimilation.

Garrett, who had a personal connection with the employer (his mother's real estate agent), recalled when he received feedback after the first day of his internship:

So the first day went well. It was a tough day, a lot of learning; it's like the first day of high school... I went home about 6:15pm and told my mom about the day. Then she got an email from Dan that says he couldn't believe that I stayed until 6:15 on the first day. He was impressed. When I got that email I thought, "It is

okay.” I’m on the right track here...getting feedback after the first day is not very common. It was very cool and a unique situation.

Since Garrett’s employer was his mother’s personal contact, he was able to hear from his mother what Dan thought of his performance on the first day. Even though the feedback was somewhat indirect, receiving information made Garrett feel relieved and motivated to work hard throughout the internship and he did not want to disappoint the employer’s first impression. Garrett noted that getting the feedback after the first day is not common because not all interns share personal connections as Garrett did, and he felt privileged. This suggests that giving feedback and telling interns how they did after the first day or earlier in the internship can enhance interns’ understanding of their responsibilities and make them feel valued.

The importance of giving feedback, whether it is positive or negative, is well demonstrated in Jessa’s testimony. Jessa was desperate to get any feedback or reward for her work when she was interning at a large accounting firm. She said,

Human resources didn't do a weekly check-up on me or anything. So when I finished tax returns, all I did was to push "send" or "submit.” And then I just had to start another one, right then. I wanted there to be something more, something bigger.

Jessa worked on the same type of independent and repetitive tasks and commented that “Even dogs can do it.” The lack of any feedback made completing this tedious work difficult, she said that it culminated into a decision to leave her internship early.

As shown, students’ level of satisfaction with their internships and assimilation into the host organizations was influenced by communication from employers concerning evaluation of interns’ performance and accomplishments. As noted earlier, students were often uncertain about

how worthwhile their work and efforts were and they wondered if they were contributing to the organization. When students received feedback or evaluation of their work, their uncertainty was lowered. For Jessa, to be motivated to keep accomplishing her tasks, any form of feedback or appreciation was needed; she described, “[I needed] something more than hitting the ‘send’ button [when I finished the tax returns].” Interns indicated that hearing feedback from employers about their work was highly important in terms of motivation.

In another case, Jason’s more structured internship program provided him with formal evaluations several times throughout the course of his internship. Jason explained that the supervisor did not only tell him how he was doing and some things he needed work on, but also asked him what he thought about his internship and the organization in order to improve the internship program. These conversations were an opportunity for Jason to tell the supervisor, “I want to learn more about how to use database,” and then the supervisor took immediate action and arranged for an opportunity for him to learn the database accordingly. Through these conversations, evaluations of the intern and of the internship program created an opportunity for feedback and adjustments to make the experience mutually beneficial. Jason said, “The internship process was really collaborative, and they took a lot of time [to make it work].” As Jason mentioned, since it takes a lot of effort for employers to do evaluations and provide feedback, smaller organizations are often not willing to spend the time and cost. However, student interns’ experiences of employer communication and feedback regarding their performance had a positive impact on students’ assimilation into the host organization.

In sum, the participants’ experiences and testimonies confirm that being accepted and appreciated by incumbents is important for newcomers’ encounter stage as discussed in existing literature (i.e. Feldman, 1977; Jablin, 1987, 2001). Importantly, new interns’ observations of

incumbents' verbal and nonverbal communication – indirect socialization – influenced their learning of organizational culture and assimilation. This study confirms findings from existing research on the organizational assimilation encounter stage (i.e., Feldman, 1977; Jablin, 1987, 2001; Katz, 1985) and extends the applicability to part-time internship work.

Second, positive experiences in socializing with supervisors, sharing casual relationships through friendly interactions and hearing feedback about interns' performance impacts student interns' motivation to perform at a higher level, while enhancing interns' assimilation into the host organization throughout the internships. However, if socialization experiences do not align with intern's expectations in a positive way or if they violate interns' values, then interns will have difficulty assimilating in the organization and the internship experience will be highly influential on their future expectations of work.

### ***Personalities/Characteristics and Work Styles***

Just as there were differences in the types and forms of internship programs in which students participated, interns' personalities varied as well. Both organizational assimilation theory and the internship stage models do not specifically address newcomers' personalities and how individual characteristics influence the assimilation process. However, seven of 13 participants reported that they learned a lot about their own personalities and work styles through their internship experience. Throughout this study, it became apparent that while interns described similar situations across organizations, they responded very differently due to unique personalities. Therefore, personality and work style likely have a bearing on students' satisfaction with their internship experiences and how they assimilate into host organizations.

For example, when Martin was an intern at a financial advisor's office, he was the only intern who was working independently, and the training process was done completely through a computer program. He explained:

I work independently really well, so I can sit down at a computer and do the trainings for hours, and I won't be bored. So I did that for about two months...The advisor [employer] was there for some tips, but it's very independent work where I can get a lot more out of it *because* I do it myself.

Martin's internship suited for him because his independent work style and personality matched well with the nature of the tasks given and he interpreted that he was able to learn a lot because he was able to work by himself.

Similarly, Jenny also enjoyed having autonomy and leading herself to work on tasks independently. Jenny said, "Self-direction and self-motivation was very important for my internship... so many interns just fail because they aren't used to managing themselves a lot and working on their own." Even though, Jenny had to figure things out by herself due to lack of training and orientation at the beginning of her internship, she was able to adapt to the situation and teach herself things quickly because she had self-direction and self-motivation skills. As Jenny explained, those who did not have the same work styles and personalities failed to accomplish tasks during the same internship program.

In contrast, Jessa and Ally discovered through their internship experiences that they do not have the personalities or desire to work on computers by themselves without interpersonal interactions. Jessa, worked in a cubicle on her own computer all day long throughout her internship without getting any type of feedback or communication with other interns or her employer. She said, "I think I am THAT extraverted. I need other people. I could not go sit back



at the computer.” Even though Jessa said that she knew that accounting jobs require less human interactions than other fields, she thought that it would be different for her, because she is outgoing and confident at shifting environments in which she is situated. She thought that accounting jobs were “boring,” as she described, because the personality of the people who work in the field tend to be introverted; since she has a different personality and planned on using a more outgoing and engaging work style at the job, she expected that she would enjoy the job. However, when she realized that her extraverted personality could not change the organizational culture and shift the nature of the tasks, she was so frustrated that she would cry in her cubicle.

Ally also worked on a computer most of her time in a small nonprofit organization’s office. Ally said, “I am good at repetition, but I don’t love it. I don’t love computer time...I can do it for entertainment, but not for work. I want to be able to talk to people, like event planning or promotional events...” Ally realized that the kind of job she did for her internship would not work well for her as a career and she would be searching for jobs that would allow more interpersonal communication. Jessa and Ally were not alone, other participants explained that they learned what they do *not* want to do or should *not* do for their future career based on better understanding of their own personality and preferences discovered through their internship experience.

Findings indicate that newcomers’ personality and work styles affect their satisfaction with their jobs and assimilation into the host organization. Those who faced a disconnect between the personality required for the job and their own personalities expressed dissatisfaction with their internships and assimilated at a slower rate or never assimilated into their host organizations. As several participants mentioned, if students do not “try” their career through internships and realize what kinds of jobs would or would not fit well for their personality, it will

be detrimental for them to face the disconnect after getting full-time jobs. This concern reinforces the importance of internships for students' careers and adds that personality and work style are other factors to be considered when internship decisions are made.

Further, as much as it is important for students' to find out whether or not their personalities match with internship employers, host organizations also benefit from recruiting interns who have matching personalities and work styles. First, organizations benefit in terms of the quality of labor and reduced time and financial costs when interns' personalities and work styles match organizational norms. Especially organizations that hope to use low-cost labor by recruiting interns should consider hiring interns who have the right fit for the organization in order to achieve quality outcomes from having interns. For example, Jessa's host organization paid her \$19 per hour for doing something she claimed anyone can do (as Jessa described, "even dogs can do it"), but since Jessa ended up quitting early due to failing to assimilate into the host organization and a high level of dissatisfaction, it caused the employers to hire and train someone new to replace her position.

Second, if recruitment is the main purpose of offering internship programs, selecting interns with strong potential in terms of work style and personality will lead to better hiring opportunities. Greater screening of interns may seem like common sense, but many of the employers, such as Noah's, did not meet the interns face-to-face and in his case hired him based on a self-descriptive paragraph over email. In another case, Lisa did visit her host non-profit organization for a face-to-face interview but reported that the recruiter talked about "basic ideas of what interns can do here" instead of asking questions about her. Lisa was not only disappointed with the overall internship program due to the poor fit, but also lost her desire to work for non-profit organizations in general. If interns that are hired do not have a compatible fit,

organizations lose the cost invested in the internship program and the chance to recruit new full-time members.

In conclusion, Monte confirmed that personality was the most important aspect for his internship. Monte recalled:

The biggest thing they look for in the department was personality because when you become an agent for the company, you will face a lot of stressful situations, so you have to be flexible and have social skills to deal with it. I think the reason they did this internship was to test our personalities. They did a personality test during the supervisor interview, and it was quite a long process... And everybody there had great social skills and similar personalities. So you just talk with any of the other interns and any other employees easily; everybody there was very social, talkative, and flexible.

As Monte's story suggests, careful recruiting practices that accounted for personality resulted in a better fit between organizational members. Therefore, while students need to be aware of careers that would fit well with their personality and work style, employers also need to identify what characteristics and work styles fit well in their organization in order to recruit interns with similar traits. Since personality is something that is not easily shifted, while skills can be achieved through short-term training, this finding brings important implications that will be explored further in the discussion section.

### *Metamorphosis*

Metamorphosis is the state of being completely and successfully assimilated into an organization, where one considers himself/herself a full member (Jablin, 1987, 2001). Jablin's organizational assimilation stage model (1987, 2001) explains newcomers' assimilation

experience as a linear process. That is, in the previous section, it was discussed that newcomers gain experience and knowledge about their host organization in the encounter stage, which then contributes to arriving at the next stage, metamorphosis. Thus, the process of assimilation and metamorphosis are two different concepts; as mentioned, metamorphosis occurs when newcomers become fully participating members and identify with the organizational culture as a result of successful assimilation (Jablin, 1987). When individuals experience metamorphosis, they have more ability to modify their roles and responsibilities, while simultaneously identifying with organizational values and characteristics (Kramer, 2010).

Jablin (2001) notes that it usually takes three to six months for newcomers to consider themselves as no longer “new.” Although some individuals assimilate faster than others (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992), it is important to note that speed of full assimilation into the organization is not a major concern for full-time members, compared to short-term employees or student interns who spend a limited amount of time in the organization. In other words, students’ specified short employment term (usually a semester) spent in the host organization can prevent interns from fully immersing themselves in the organization.

Internship stages models describe that, towards the end of the internship, students become confident at their job and are therefore more productive (Inkster & Ross, 1993; Kiser, 2000; Sweitzer & King, 1994, 1995). However, job confidence is not the same as self-identification as a full member. Indeed, metamorphosis was difficult to identify as scholars discuss (Jablin, 2001; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Even if students considered themselves as part of the organization and no longer “new members,” there were limited or missing signs to indicate their transition into metamorphosis, such as individualization of responsibilities. As previously explained, individualization takes place when newcomers attempt to change the organization to meet their

needs (Jablin, 1987). While six of the 13 participants indicated some signs of successful assimilation, such as role management and higher level of job competency, only two of the participants showed clear an indication of the fully-assimilated state of metamorphosis.

Time spent in an organization provided the best indicator of metamorphosis, where some longer-term interns (greater than three months) experienced successful assimilation through earning more roles and responsibilities and being accepted and recognized by other organizational members; these experiences seemed to enhance individuals' job competency. Even though time was not the only factor that influenced the transition into metamorphosis, it was a necessary factor for the transition to be made. Kramer (2011) notes that newcomers' transition into metamorphosis occurs when uncertainty has been managed and individuals maintain their new situations. Interns who spend less than three months – usually summer interns – are less likely to experience this transition.

Another important indicator of metamorphosis was participants' references to the organization as “we” or “us.” For example, when Noah explained his experiences at the zoo for which he interned for three summers, he used “we” instead of “they,” which showed that he was well-assimilated into the organization and became a fully participating member, considering himself as “one of them.” Being a long-term intern at the same organization – three summers in a row – allowed him to participate in organizational changes and feel recognized and accepted by other organizational members. Noah explained:

I was pretty stoked [to go back to the place for the third time]. Just because I already knew everybody who was there...I am definitely recognized by now, because there is a cardboard cutout there...Definitely by the end, I think I felt like

I was part of the whole place, just because they started recognizing me, so that also kind of helped....

Noah's transition to metamorphosis was evident when he specifically mentioned that every time he went back to work at the same zoo, more people recognized him and he was able to contribute to more parts of the zoo. That is, having a continuous membership at the same organization allowed him to become a full time member, which is not available for short-term interns who work less than three months or over only one summer. Noah also added that he was able to help with various types of tasks at the large zoo, which shows that his role expanded as his internship progressed, making him feel more like an employee than a summer intern.

Jason offers a second example where both time and role responsibilities impacted metamorphosis. Jason interned at a large manufacturing corporation and worked for 40 hours a week for three and a half months. He identified himself in the metamorphosis stage towards the end of his internship, when he explained that he was able to voice his opinions to his supervisor and accomplished his responsibilities in a manner that he felt was effective. Jason recalled:

I don't want them [line workers] to think, "Who is this kid?"...One time this lady had to take her son to a doctor's appointment and she asked if she could have a day off, and we ended up saying yes...After she left, things were getting hectic, and I told the manager, "You realize that we told that lady that she can be gone today [and that's why today's work was hectic], right?" He said, "Yes, we did let her go this time, but next time we have to say no." I told him, "If you go back on your word like that, you are going to start something that you don't want to start."

This quotation demonstrates how Jason felt confident in his work as an intern. He wanted to perform his role as an assistant manager more effectively rather than be seen as a college “kid” who was doing a job-shadowing.

Feldman (1976) explains that, when employees become full members of the organization, they use role management when they need to make tentative resolution of problems at work. One of the variables for role management is mutual influence, which refers to "the extent to which individuals feel some control or power over the way work is carried out in their departments" (p. 436). Jason’s use of role management provides an example of mutual influence, indicating his metamorphosis; as an intern, Jason took initiative to correct his supervisor’s way of dealing with workers and felt confident enough to do so. While it is possible that Jason is comfortable questioning authority in general, in this example he clearly was conscious of managing his role as an intern who performs as an assistant manager, which allowed him to be more effective at his job.

Throughout the research interview, Jason noted that developing his role as a credible authority was especially important to him at work; he was dealing with line workers who were much older than he was, which posed a challenging task since he wanted to be nice to them, yet soon realized that he had to be firm and direct in order to do his job well. As his internship progressed and he understood the organizational structure and processes well. This understanding enabled him to voice his opinion to his supervisor and use a directional and authoritative communication style when dealing with the line workers. As Kramer (2011) explains, when employees are cooperative and innovative in dealing with ongoing changes during their membership, it indicates that they are highly assimilated into the organization.

As seen from both Noah and Jason's examples, student interns can make transitions into metamorphosis, although a majority of the interns were not fully assimilated into their host organizations. The similarities among participants who did experience metamorphosis included the following characteristics. First, the interns spent a longer period of time (more than three months) in the organization compared to those who did not experience metamorphosis. Second, an indication of this metamorphosis was that the interns were able to manage their roles towards the end of their internship and their roles and contributions were accepted and approved by organizational members.

Even though two student interns were able to make a transition into the metamorphosis stage as full-time members do, there is a difference between full-time members' and student interns' metamorphosis. When full-time employees experience metamorphosis, the status quo remains until the members voluntarily or involuntarily exit, contributing to the members' success within the organization (Doerfel & Connaughton, 2006; Jablin, 1987, 2001). However, since an internship period is pre-determined and interns experience metamorphosis towards the end of their internship, their metamorphosis represents a temporary status. Even if a student is offered a full-time position at the conclusion of the internship, he/she often moves backward to the encounter stage as a "new" member if there is a break in employment to allow for completion of coursework or if there is relocation to a different organizational site. For example, Jason made the transition into the metamorphosis stage and was offered a full-time position towards the end of his internship; however, since his internship was done a year before his graduation, he will be away from the organization for a year. Furthermore, when Jason returns to work for the organization, he will be located at a different manufacturing plant from where he interned. While Jason will have some organizational experience, he will still be considered a newcomer and will



have to adapt to a new organizational environment. This interesting dynamic towards the end of students' internship will be discussed further in the following section.

### *Exit*

All three internship stage models contend that in the final internship stage, students discontinue relationships they built during the course of an internship and celebrate their accomplishments (Inkster & Ross, 1993; Kiser, 2000; Sweitzer & King, 1994, 1995). According to the models, student interns experience exit based on a predetermined internship period. However, the internships represented in this study were of various types and lengths, leading to differences in how students ended their internships. Jablin (1987) explains that the organizational exit process is generally a continuum of disengagement with the organization rather than a single experience, where members' exit process can influence and be influenced by their levels of assimilation. Further, in cases where student interns return to the same organization as full-time members, their exit and re-entry in the future can be closely related. Thus, the following discusses two major topics that emerged in regards to internship exit, which include (1) a lack of a debriefing, and (2) making decisions about full-time positions at the end of the internship.

### *Debriefing*

One process that influenced interns' evaluation of their own internship and the host organization was debriefing, or the absence of debriefing. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines debriefing as "a careful review upon completion" (2012). To extend the definition in the context of internships, debriefing is a process of communicating/reviewing what is learned or achieved as well as providing both positive feedback and areas for improvement after the completion of an internship. Debriefing, while not discussed in the internship stage models, is an important component to the exit stage because internship work is frequently monitored and requires

reflection on students' learning outcomes. Surprisingly, nine out of the 13 participants did not experience formal debriefing. However, four interns who took part in rigorous internship programs indicated that the host organization included a debriefing interview.

For example, Monte's host organization had a one-on-one final review meeting individually with each intern where the supervisors told the interns their strengths and weaknesses which were observed during the course of the internship. Monte commented:

It was good, because they told me all the good things I did that summer. They also told me things I need to improve as a leader, like how I need to give people deadlines when organizing tasks and jobs. It was good because I like to know how I can learn from my experience.

This example demonstrates how the organization took part in "celebrating accomplishment" as predicted by the internship stage model, but moves beyond celebrating to provide feedback for personal development. The positive feedback and areas for improvement allowed Monte to determine how and why employers were impressed by his performance, while receiving constructive suggestions on how to become a better organizational member in his future career.

However, when there was no debriefing or any type of review process before exiting the organization, interns indicated uncertainty and doubts about their performance. For example, Jessa had become extremely frustrated and disappointed with her internship, as revealed throughout different parts of the findings, and she eventually decided to quit early. The internship was originally a three months-long program, but she left a month after she started. Jessa recalled when she emailed a human resources staff to notify that she would be leaving immediately:

She was really disappointed. I tried to soften it by saying, "I know you guys took a big chance on me, recruiting me from out of state, and I really appreciate the opportunity, but I just couldn't do it anymore." And she was very short. She just wanted to make sure that all the computers were back and stuff like that [laugh]. I did offer to go back in and talk to her face-to-face after the initial shock of it at all. I mean, that wasn't even suggested, but they should have done something like that. Because I would have said that human resources are not doing a very good job because they never checked on me ever until I decided to quit!

Jessa explained that the exit was a very stressful and emotional experience, just as the actual internship had been. She noted her isolation and lack of any interaction when she shared that the other employees around her did not even notice that she was crying and packing her belongings to leave the firm for good. Further, considering how abrupt her exit was, it was surprising that the human resources staff did not email her back or follow up to determine what had transpired. The only call she received from the office was asking about the computers and database, rather than why she decided to quit. Even when she told the employer that she would be willing to share her reasons for quitting and how they could improve the internship program, the employer chose not to meet with her. The exit events and lack of debriefing resulted in further negative feelings regarding her internship experience, and at the end, she was only "happy to get out of there." Since there was no review of what was learned from the rather short internship experience, when asked what the learning outcome was, she said, "Now I am a master of putting numbers in the database! That's it." However, since she no longer pursues a career in accounting, her skill or putting numbers in the database has no meaning or lasting benefit.

Garrett's internship was not as stressful as Jessa's, but he also made the decision to quit early. He had been working unpaid 30-40 hours a week. Once Garrett had accumulated enough hours of work experience for his internship class, he left to take a job where he could make money. He recalled his exit:

That last meeting I had with her was great. I got her a bottle of wine and said, "Thank you." The debriefing was good because I got to learn. I wanted to learn how she thought. That is more than anything. That was really good for me to take all that information in before I left. I took notes on that, and I still have those.

That was why I feel like I came full circle in the end with that meeting.

Garrett explained that he did not want the employers to think that he was blaming them for not paying him when he told them that he needed to find a job to make money. He wanted to leave the employers with a good impression, so he thanked them for the opportunity and requested a debriefing. The debriefing made the exit successful because Garrett felt that he learned from talking with and asking questions to the employers. He explained that he was very glad he requested the meeting before he left the office. If Garrett's employers rejected the request to hold the meeting as Jessa's organization did, Garrett's level of satisfaction and learning outcomes would have been lower.

Findings indicate that debriefing provided important information for student interns' during the exit stage, particularly if the main purpose for doing an internship was to learn. When organizations were not willing to conduct debriefing, students described leaving with a negative impression about the organization and uncertainties about how they performed and what they learned. As Jessa stated, "They did not even check on me even when I decided to quit!" leaving her with the impression that the organization "does not care about their people."

The debriefing process is very communicative. Students in several examples had to use communication tactics to request a meeting and manage the interaction well in order to discontinue the relationship with employer(s) on good terms. Employers also had to communicate effectively with interns when discussing strengths and weakness to enhance students' learning experiences.

### ***Uncertainties Regarding Full-time Job Offers and Decision-making***

Since organizations often offer internship programs for recruiting purpose, many participants dealt with making decisions about whether or not to take a job with the host organization, which job to accept when faced with two different job offers, or to search for another job during the exit process. Among the internship stage models, Inkster and Ross's (1993) model is the only one that recognizes the possibility for student interns to return to the organization as full-time members. The findings indicated that having to make the decision whether or not to return to the organization influenced students' exit process.

Jablin (1987) explains that full-time members who are either leaving or remaining in the organization experience uncertainties during the exit process. These uncertainties can be reduced by interpersonal communication between the exiting and the remaining members. In particular, exiting and remaining members find communication is helpful when job-related information is shared and explanations of the exit of the employee are offered (Jablin, 1987). The study's findings confirm sharing information is also important for student interns who are exiting the host organization. Interns indicated the importance of communication with their supervisors during the exit process and discussed how the amount of communication influenced their feelings of uncertainty. The findings confirm organizational assimilation theory and can enhance the existing stage models.

While some participants experienced a smooth exit through clearly communicating about job offers with their supervisors, others dealt with uncertainties of getting a job at their host organizations and stressful situations about their future careers. Students explained that it was particularly difficult to make a decision when they had received a job offer from a different organization at the same time they were offered a full-time position at their internship organization. Even when students were offered a position at the internship organization as they wished, poor instructions and missing formal assurance through paperwork created confusion as to whether/when they would be able to start working as a full-time member.

Cora's case illustrates concerns she experienced in making a choice between two different job offers at the end of her internship. Her effective use of communication tactics helped her to experience a smooth exit process. Cora was an excellent intern at a business consulting firm as evidenced by how the executives complimented her accomplishments throughout her internship. She talked about her exit and how she struggled in making a difficult decision:

The executive wanted me to stay and help out, and I was seriously considering taking the job, because I liked working at the firm and what they did, and it really fit my interests well. But then I got an offer from a larger business corporate office at the same time! I was in a really big dilemma. I thought about it for a long time... I asked the executive, "If you were in my shoes and if you were to give me personal advice, what would you say?" He told me that he would really like to keep me because I did a really good job for him; but, for me, as a recent college graduate with no work experience, it would be good to start in the corporate

environment... So he said, "I would say, it would be best if you go take the other job, but if you ever wanted to come back, the position is always here for you."

Cora faced the dilemma of having two full-time job offers within one week and needed to decide which would be the best career option. This decision was complex because she was satisfied with her internship, successfully assimilated into the organization, and her career goals matched with the organization's goals. Cora explained that she left the firm with a good impression and had a positive experience exiting the internship program. Being honest with the executive and asking for his opinion was a successful communication strategy because she was able to receive advice from an experienced expert in a similar field while simultaneously letting her employer know why she did not accept the job offer. This proved to be a successful strategy compared to if she had avoided talking about her situation and left on less positive terms. This example illustrates the importance of the role of communication in the exit stage (Jablin, 1987), which is often ignored in the existing literature on internships.

Another participant Hannah worked at a small consulting firm and was also offered a full-time position at the end of her internship. However, while Cora was offered a promotion from her internship position to become a marketing director, Hanna was offered the same administration position she had performed during her internship and chose not accept. Hannah explained that, doing some administrative work was fine for her internship because it was a learning experience, but she did not want to do the same for her future career. In this instance, Hannah clearly told the employer that it was not what she wanted to do even though she did not have an alternative job offer at that time, providing another example of how an intern addressed the exit situation by using clear and honest communication with the employer about her decisions regarding the job offer.

This study also found that students viewed internships differently from full-time work. There were discrepancies between what interns were willing to do for an internship (i.e. administrative work, work without pay, etc.) compared to what they expected to do in their future careers. The exit stage of the internship models could be enhanced by including the ways students use communication as well as how they make the decisions to return or not return to the host organization as full-time members. These findings also contribute the practical implication that interns should be aware of what would be best for them towards the end of their internships and the important role communication plays in exiting an organization. Cora indicated she was not certain of what the best decision was for her, but luckily she was able to seek advice from her employer using effective communication and leave on good terms. Whereas, Hannah knew exactly what she wanted to do for her future career and decided that she would rather search for another job that would suit well for her interest and passion, but left on good terms because she was able to communicate clearly her desired position.

However, for interns who were uncertain and could not make a well-informed decision, having to deal with the decision making during their planned exit from their host organizations created a confusing experience even when they were assimilated into the organization. This finding is supported by examples that show participants' experiences with confusing and stressful exit processes due to poor communication regarding full-time job offers. Even when students were certain about their career plans and had made a decision to take the position they were offered at the end of their internship, they still experienced confusion and uncertainty due to host organizations' lack of clear communication and strategic recruitment planning. Noah, after interning at a zoo for three summers, was offered a full-time position from his supervisor.



However, he was faced with organizational conflicts and changes caused by the supervisor's decision to quit. Noah described the situation:

She was telling me that [she's going to hire me as full-time] back in March, and then she just left. And if she's not there, there's no point of working there, because she was basically leading the whole office. It's not like I have another job offer or anything now [laugh] so...it kind of sucks because she had been talking about me working there for a year.

The third time Noah went back to the office to intern, the supervisor assured him that he would have a job, so Noah did not search for other jobs his senior year. Noah indicated feeling secure in this decision because he had made the transition into metamorphosis, becoming a fully assimilated member of the organization, and he had no doubts about taking the offer. However, quickly after his last internship, he was told that the job offer was no longer valid. This caused Noah to feel disappointed and anxious as he began his search for another job. He explained that the job position he was offered was a unique one, so he felt worried that he would not find a similar position and the job searching process might not go well. Noah's example demonstrates that problems occurring when organizations offer positions without strategic planning can be detrimental for students' careers. Since Noah did not sign contract before he left the internship program, he did not have the right to claim the job and he was unable to change the situation.

Similarly, but to a lesser extent, Monte dealt with uncertainties and a stressful situation regarding the full-time job he was offered right before he exited the host organization. During the final debriefing, Monte was told that the supervisor would be happy to hire him and he would be contacted to hear more about the job offer closer to graduation. However, Monte had not heard from the organization after two months from the completion of the internship, and he was

anxious and uncertain whether he should contact the supervisor or just start looking for a different job. In both Monte's and Noah's case, there was no formal process to assure and guarantee employment beyond a few verbal exchanges. Even though the exit process went smoothly, the lack of formality regarding full-time job offers caused Monte and Noah uncertainties about their future careers. Host organizations' unclear communication may cost them qualified employees after investing training and resources in the interns.

The need for formality during the exit process draws helpful implications regarding recruiting college students through internship programs. Because internships are usually completed when students are still enrolled in school and there is a gap in the timeline between exit and re-entry to the host organization, student interns may have higher uncertainties regarding their future career when they exit than full-time members do. These uncertainties lead to a greater importance of interpersonal communication and sharing job-related information clearly between host organization members and interns. Further, formal communication with concrete information is needed to reduce interns' uncertainty if host organizations want to convert interns into full members.

In contrast to Noah and Monte's experience, Jason experienced a successful planned exit which included a formal process to secure a full-time position after graduation. In this case, Jason completed his internship a year prior to graduation and explained the communication exchange:

After they offered me the job, they asked me when I want my start date to be. The supervisor told me they are so excited to have me there. I was also told that the HR will provide monetary support and supply a moving truck to make my transition easier.

In this case, Jason's internship was at an organization that was larger and more formally structured compared to other participants' host organizations. However practical implications can be drawn from his experience and applied to other internship programs, including using specific communication exchanges to reduce uncertainties and make future employment terms clear. In sum, these findings are useful additions to existing research both in terms of organizational exit and internships. Specifically, these findings address Davis and Myers' (2012) call to continue exploring organizational exit. Additionally this study extends findings regarding interns' and short-term/temporary members' exit processes and provides information to extend existing internship stage models.

### **Organizational Identity**

Organizational identity is defined as a concept organizations use to characterize themselves (Albert & Whetten, 1985). In order to explore organizational identity and the influence that it may have on organizational assimilation processes, the second research question asked, "How are interns' perceptions of organizational identity shaped throughout the internship experience, and how does it influence their assimilation?" This study anticipated that as students experience metamorphosis into organizations throughout their internship, they would be able to obtain an insiders' view and understand organizational identity. Therefore, interview questions asked "How did employers and staff describe their organization?" and "How did your thoughts or attitudes towards the organization change after the internship?" However, these questions were met with confusion from participants.

The questions were re-phrased as more interviews were conducted. However, even when the question was made more specific, such as "Could you describe the organization's characteristics using three adjectives?" many participants still found it difficult to answer. When

participants did answer the question, it was problematic to determine whether they were referring to organizational identity or the organizational culture in which they were situated. For example, seven of the 13 participants used the adjectives “relaxed” or “comfortable” as a result of their realization that a professional work environment was not always as strict and formal as they expected. Overall, participants’ descriptions were more general than specific in reference to their host organizations. As a result, the findings did not allow for a differentiation between organizational culture – a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group (Deslandes, 2011) – from organizational identity. Findings do confirm that identity is indeed a complicated, intricate, and the least well-understood concept as described by Hall (1996).

Many participants’ assimilation was promoted by positive perceptions of organizational culture. For example, Cora positively described her host organization as “open-minded,” “friendly,” and “group-oriented.” Cora eventually experienced full metamorphosis into her internship organization and considered taking a full-time position there. On the other hand, those who perceived organizational culture negatively did not experience metamorphosis into the host organization during their internships and were not satisfied with their experience, such as Lisa who saw conflicts and tensions from observing incumbents’ behaviors and Jessa who described the organization as a “lonely and not motivating” workplace. The findings initially indicate a positive relationship between perceived organizational culture and assimilation; however, further research is needed to substantiate this finding with a larger sample.

In regards to organizational culture, this study’s findings that student interns’ perceived organizational culture was shaped by simply being in the organizational setting and observing its values and norms. In Jessa’s case, for example, she heard positive qualities about the host organization directly from the supervisors during the first week of training, such as having the

benefit of flexible hours. At face value, flexibility seemed like a nice benefit and caused Jessa to see the flexibility as something positive. According to Jessa, the company described themselves as “family-friendly” and “modern” as they explained the benefits they offer for their employees. But, once Jessa started working, these positive qualities played out differently than she anticipated; the flexible hours were not “friendly” as Jessa had expected because the variation in hours led to fewer people in the office at any one time, making the office felt empty and lonely. That is, Jessa never experienced the positive culture of “family-friendliness” and “modern-ness.” This shows that interns perceived the host organizations’ culture through their experience with the organization and communication with organizational members, rather than accepting at face value the characteristics of the organization that was described by internal members. Throughout the study, interns acknowledged how the organizational members described the culture, but at times indicated contradictions between the descriptions and their experiences.

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion**

This study explored student interns' assimilation process during their course of internships as well as the impact of perceived organizational identities on their assimilation. This chapter discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Organizational assimilation processes were examined in this study as a framework to enhance scholarly understanding of student interns' overall experiences from searching for potential internships to exiting host organizations. Throughout the findings section, several limitations of existing internship stage models were identified. The following section discusses these limitations and explains how organizational assimilation theory can be integrated into the internship stage models to further develop communication theory pertaining to part time work, including internships. Additionally, implications for organizational identity theory will be discussed in terms of its inappropriateness for short-term or temporary newcomers' assimilation research due to its complicate and intricate nature.

### ***Organizational Assimilation***

The process of people joining, becoming members of, and exiting organizations has received considerable attention in the field of communication (i.e., Davis & Myers, 2012; Kramer, 2010; Myers & Oetzel, 2003; Waldeck & Myers, 2007). Organizational assimilation theory accounts for communicative dynamics among organizational members and provides predictive information about how organizational members join and become full members in organizations (Jablin, 1987, 2001). This study of student interns' assimilation also brings several theoretical implications in regards to temporary or short-term members' assimilation.

First, short-term or temporary newcomers who do not have professional work experience are more adaptive to socialization than individualization in the encounter stage. Jablin (1987) and internship stage models (Inkster & Ross, 1993; Kiser, 2000; Sweitzer & King, 1994) discuss that the encounter stage can be destructive, dissatisfying, and disillusioning when newcomers – both full-time members and student interns – enter the organization, mainly because they experience a disconnect between initial expectations and reality. However, in this study, student interns who do not have previous work experience indicated that they did not have specific expectations before they began as an intern, and could not compare their internship to other work. For example, Monte explained, “I really did not have any expectations because I did not know what it is like to be an intern. I learned what internship is through internship [laugh].”

In reverse, employers who never had an intern before also did not know what to expect from interns. Garrett said, “I think, he was thinking, ‘What are we going to do with this kid? First we need to make sure this kid is okay.’” That is, due to lack of experience, both parties had uncertainties and difficulties in developing accurate expectations for each other. In this case, student interns seem to rely on *socialization*, which is organizations’ efforts to influence and change members to meet their needs (Jablin, 1987), such as orientation/trainings and social events that gave interns opportunities to interact with one another. Likewise, short-term or temporary newcomers who do not have skills to individualize their roles and work also needed more socialization in order to successfully assimilate into the organization during the short time period. Therefore, this study adds to the existing literature regarding short-term internships, indicating that, between the two interrelated processes – socialization and individualization – socialization is the more dominant process.

Second, this study found that interns, as short-term or temporary members, often do not experience metamorphosis due to the limited time they spend in organizations. Although six students showed some signs of beginning the transition into becoming full-members, only two participants actually made the complete transitions into metamorphosis. One of possible explanations for part-time/temporary members' not reaching metamorphosis is, because a planned exit was imminent, they were less likely to make efforts to become active members. For example, Cora explained her initial attitude towards her internship before she was assimilated into the host organization:

Since I didn't know I would be offered a full-time position, my mindset was, 'I would be here temporarily' and I didn't care much about what the company was doing overall and where the business is going...I just wanted to go there and accomplish my own task, submit it, and go home.

Cora's testimony may represent short-term or temporary members' attitudes towards the organizations, demonstrating that interns do not make attempts to assimilate into the organization through actively learning organizational norms and behaviors, because their exit is predetermined and they do not feel the need to become full members.

The six participants who expressed reaching the beginning of metamorphosis stage in their host organizations indicated that they had more hours per week (20 hours or greater) or were longer-term interns (more than one semester), which allowed them to experience various organizational activities and gain more roles. Even though Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992) argue that some newcomers assimilate more quickly than others and some assimilate in one aspect of organizational life more rapidly than in other aspects, this study suggests that there can be a minimum time frame for newcomers – greater than three months in the case of student interns –



in order to start assimilating into organizations. While time was not the only indicator of assimilation, it allows newcomers to immerse themselves in the organizational settings and experience various tasks and role management.

### ***Internship Stage Models***

While the internship stage models (Inkster & Ross, 1993; Kiser, 2000; Sweitzer & King, 1994, 1995) theorize events and emotions that occur during students' internship experiences, this paper integrated organizational assimilation processes with the models to better account for the most important aspects of students' learning outcomes – learning to be part of a professional organization. The findings confirmed that student interns experience Jablin's (1987, 2001) organizational assimilation stages and that the assimilation processes compliment the internship stage models by adding important details about internship experiences.

First, anticipatory socialization was more influential than the internship stage models simplify. As reviewed in the third chapter, Kiser's (2000) *pre-placement stage*, Sweitzer and King's (1994, 1995) *anticipation stage*, and Inkster and Ross's (1993) *stage one* (described as “arranging and anticipating”) simplify the beginning stage as one single step in which students search for an internship, secure a position, and anticipate the new experience. However, as Jablin's (1987, 2001) assimilation stage model contends, two separate processes occur during this beginning stage of participants' internships – vocational and organizational anticipatory socialization. The internship models could be enhanced by including both vocational and organizational anticipatory socialization for two reasons.

First, students do not only gather different types of information but also feel differently about internships during the two separate processes. To illustrate, during vocational anticipatory socialization, students learned why participating in an internship was important and how it would

benefit their career. In the conversations of vocational anticipatory socializations, students discussed broad understanding of internships in general and indicated mostly indifference or neutral feelings about the information they gained. Then, during descriptions of organizational anticipatory socialization events (i.e. applying for internship positions, going to interviews) they learned about the specific organization in which they were interested in joining and experienced a range of emotions including stress, anxiousness, and excitement due to uncertainties and limited information about the internship. Second, how students experience the two separate processes had bearing on their success in the internship programs. Those who were actively engaged in vocational and organizational anticipatory socialization and effectively communicated with recruiters indicated higher levels of assimilation.

Additionally, it was found that students are more adaptive to socialization and tend to avoid confrontation, thus Sweitzer and King's (1994, 1995) *confrontation* stage can be re-thought. The stage that precedes confrontation is *disillusionment* and students reacted rather passively to their experience of disillusionment or discrepancies between initial expectations and reality they faced during the encounter stage. For example, Lisa often felt as if she was wasting her time because the employer did not provide clear directions, and instead of asking them to explain what she could do, Lisa would "be sitting there trying to look busy." In another example, when Jessa started feeling frustrated because of the repetitive tasks and the lack of interpersonal interactions, Jessa jumped right into the organizational exit instead of attempting to confront the situation to make changes. Third, there should be an optional stage that indicates students' full membership towards the end of their internships. Internship stage models include *working* (Kiser, 2000), *competence* (Sweitzer & King, 1994, 1995), and *stage four* "productivity and independence" (Inkster & Ross, 1993). The findings indicated that student interns become

competent and comfortable with their jobs as indicated in the stage models, and metamorphosis may follow once they reach the stages – *working*, *competence*, and *stage four*. While full metamorphosis is seldom achieved, factors that enhance metamorphosis include spending more than three months in an organization, working full work days, experiencing more responsibilities and role management. When these factors are experienced during *working*, *competence*, and *stage four*, following the stages with an additional stage to explain student interns’ full transition into the host organization – metamorphosis – would better reflect the assimilation process.

Lastly, students’ planned exit from their host organizations were more complicated than simply “discontinuing their jobs and work relationships” as the internship stage models describe. One of the common uncertainties students dealt with regarded full-time job offers received before their exit. This bears examination because organizations often offer internships for recruiting purposes. Inkster and Ross’s (1993) model is the only one that recognizes that students either re-enter their host organizations as full-time members or go back to classrooms, and this study confirms Diambra et al.’s (2004) argument that this model offers comprehensive and specific stages that capture both sequential and emotional experiences unlike the other two models.

### ***Organizational Identity and Its Influence on Assimilation***

The conceptualization of organizational identity has been challenging ever since Albert and Whetten (1985) introduced the theory. The scholars noted that organizational identity is organizational members’ answers to the question, “Who are we as an organization?” and it should be a central, distinguishing, and continuing character of the organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Despite the criteria, this study’s findings proved that the concept is so complex and intricate that student interns often did not know how to answer the question. One of the

explanations may be that organizational identity can only be understood by higher-level members who not only spent a long time in the organization, but also participate in various organizational activities, changes, and planning that affects the organization. In other words, higher-level members are more involved and have greater inside knowledge compared to students or short-term/temporary members.

Additionally, temporary or short-term members' limited time and low investment in the organization may contribute to difficulties describing organizational identity. Since organizational identity is an enduring concept (Albert & Whetten, 1985), short term members do not have the organizational memory and experiences compared to full members that may allow understanding of central characteristics.

When unable to answer questions about organizational identity, a probing question to assess interns understanding of organizational identity asked, "Could you use three adjectives to describe the organization for which you interned?" Resulting participant answers were rather broad and general, including words such as "friendly," "open," and "unique" to describe the organizations' culture. Organizational culture is defined as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group" (Schein, 1985, p. 17), and includes values, norms, and habits.

As Hatch and Schultz (2000) have pointed out, "culture contextualizes identity," it is what makes it possible, being in a way the smallest common denominator between members of the organization, without their being necessarily aware of it. From this point of view, organizational culture and identity mutually construct each other (as cited in Deslandes, 2011, p. 24).

Since organizational culture contextualizes organizational identity, it may be that perceiving and understanding organizational culture inevitably precedes individual's ability to grasp organizational identity. As organizational members spent more time and move up to higher levels, they may become able to understand the organizational identity without even being aware of the transition.

As findings showed, there seems to be a positive relationship between student interns' perceived organizational culture and their assimilation. However, short-term interns/temporary members and full-time members may experience organizational culture differently. Short-term or temporary members do not see the necessity to agree with or feel comfortable with organizational culture in order to effectively function as a member since they are in the organization for a predetermined period, whereas full-time newcomers who do not feel comfortable with the organizational culture may be less likely to tolerate discrepancies because there is not a prescribed end date to the work. In sum, organizational identity theory was not understood by part-time interns, and organizational culture may provide a better theoretical framework for future research.

### **Practical Implications**

Beyond enhancing theoretical understandings, this study also offers practical implications for all three involved parties in internship programs – students, host organizations, and academic advisors.

#### ***Students***

First, to make their internship experience more productive and meaningful, students should know their career goals and understand what kind of jobs and organizations provide a good match to their personalities. There are several personality and work assessment surveys that

could help students explore job fit prior to searching for internships. In other words, strategic planning is required prior to taking part in an internship. For example, because Jason and Hannah learned how to search for internships and learned about several different employers, they were able to make strategic decisions to join organizations that were a good “fit” with their personalities and expectations. The findings of this study indicated that the more prepared students were before taking an internship, the more satisfying and successful experiences they had during and after internship. As Jablin’s organizational assimilation stage model (1987, 2001) indicates, both vocational and organizational anticipatory socialization influence students’ internship experiences; by utilizing and maximizing available sources including family members, academic advisors, and career fairs, students were able to actively engage in initial socialization even before they started their internships.

Additionally, instead of relying on personal connections to find an internship position or taking a position that is easy to obtain, students should actively search for organizations they are interested in experiencing. Findings indicated that students learned important information about organizations, careers, and job search skills through researching and classes that taught how to approach to finding a full-time position. As Martin confessed, students can be tempted to take the easiest way to get an internship position with putting least amount of efforts. However, Jason’s case demonstrated how seeking guidance on how to approach internships and engaging in the job search process provided a better understanding of applying for internships and future work. As the organizational assimilation stage model (Jablin, 1987, 2001) suggests, active and successful initial socialization prior to joining the organization helps students form appropriate expectations for their internships. This is especially important for individuals who do not have professional work experiences, such as students.

Once an internship position is secured, students need to use communication to make efforts to become an active member in the host organization. Students who communicated their goals and expectations from the beginning, including working hours and payment issues, experienced fewer uncertainties and conflicts compared to those who did not. Student intern communication is especially important if the host organization does not have experience hiring or working with interns. For example, students can suggest and request certain activities as part of their learning experience including an orientation (formal or informal), feedback/evaluation, and a debriefing to the extent that employers are willing.

### ***Host Organizations***

Organizations that offer internships can maximize their program benefits based on several findings from this study. First, to help students' organizational anticipatory socialization process, organizations should provide specific information on their websites regarding personality characteristics of successful interns, as well as parameters for the internship program such as hours required and payment related information. While this does not sound like a profound suggestion, students in this study expressed difficulty in finding basic information on organizations internship opportunities. Clear information would allow for students to make informed decisions regarding the internship program, alleviating disappointing discrepancies between the internship and student expectations.

Also, email communication created uncertainties and anxiety for students who were anticipating more welcoming employer responses to their introductions or questions. Thus, greater awareness is required for internship recruiters when communicating with prospective interns via email. Writing emails are often routine and necessary for organizational members, however, students who do not have professional work experience have a difficult time

interpreting emails because they lack non-verbal cues that are important for message interpretation.

Before organizations bring interns into their workspace, organizational members should discuss how they could manage their norms and behaviors in order to help interns understand how the organization functions. Awareness of the influence of member behavior on interns is crucial, especially if the purpose of the internship program is to recruit new members. As demonstrated in the findings, internal members affect student interns' decisions about future employment in the organization, to remain in the same industry, and even to change majors.

Further, organizational members should be aware that they have a great influence on student interns' perceptions of work in general. This paper explores organizational assimilation of student interns in particular, but internships alone can be considered as anticipatory socialization within students' long-term career planning processes. In this anticipatory socialization through internships, students learn what it is like to be a part of an organization and how to communicate with organizational members. Specifically, interns who do not have previous experience in regards to working are more easily socialized through their first internship experience, which then impacts perceptions and expectations for future work.

In order to enhance interns' abilities to assimilate into the organization, it is important to provide opportunities to socialize with incumbents and other interns. For example, this study found that social events or small gatherings provided helpful socialization experiences for interns. Especially in encounter stage, after students officially join the host organization and started working as interns, getting to know internal members through casual interactions made them feel more a part of the organization. Additionally, physical proximity to other interns promoted interns' socialization by increasing their interpersonal communication with peers.



Therefore, organizations should consider hosting events and arranging office space when possible to encourage interaction.

Just as students should look carefully at organizations for fit, organizations should also pay attention to the recruiting process in order to find well-matched interns. While recruiting is a serious undertaking for full time members in most organizations, this study found that many times interns were hired with little screening or thought. Perhaps this is because some of the internships were unpaid or because the internships were short term experiences. However, organizations should be careful in deciding to offer internships and selecting interns who could become prospective employees. During organizational anticipatory socialization, which includes application and interviewing processes, a mutual selection by both parties would be ideal. Also, since personality was an important factor influencing interns' attitudes and work styles, including personality tests during the interview process may be beneficial.

Lastly, organizations also bear a responsibility to clearly communicate expectations and goals throughout the internship through an orientation/training, evaluation/feedback during the internship, and a debriefing at the conclusion of the internship. If the host organization intends to offer a full-time position at the conclusion of the internship, they should provide a specific and official communication with job offer specific; this clear communication will allow both parties to reduce uncertainties and assure employment.

### ***Academic Advisors and Instructors***

Academic advisors can contribute to successful internship processes by better guiding students. While students start considering taking part in internship programs, advisors can help students narrow their interests and introduce job categories for consideration before they start thinking about which organizations would be good "fit." Then, instead of giving contact

information or directly connecting students to employers, academic advisors should encourage students to conduct research about several organizations as options for internship programs. Academic programs or classes that provide information on how to conduct a job search, encourage attendance at career fairs, and instruct students how to write their resumes teach important skills in finding both an internship and future employment. The process of giving advice for internships in general and teaching students how to approach internships fits with Jablin's (1987, 2001) vocational anticipatory socialization stage . As discussed earlier, once students pass beyond the vocational anticipatory socialization and move towards organizational anticipatory socialization, students should be more active and independent participants in the process.

During the internship, specifically after students enter the host organization and experience the encounter stage, academic advisors can directly communicate with employers to ensure that the host organization is providing clear tasks and feedback to student interns. Giving and receiving feedback was critical during internships, and student interns' academic advisors can act as an intermediary between students and supervisors to enhance their learning experiences. For example, Monte's peer interns took internship classes simultaneously during their internships which required evaluations and reflections on the work in the organization. Monte explained, "The supervisor was required to have us do projects at the end of the summer, file reports, and do midterm reviews for the students for those who are doing this for classes. Then the interns had to bring their reports and midterm and final reviews." Since Monte was not part of the process, he did not know how the supervisor and the interns' instructors communicated, but he did recognize the role of academic advisors in the communication process.

Lastly, academic advisors can help students decide the best timing for internship participation based on academic curriculum exposure and requirements. Jessa's experience demonstrated that, getting professional work experience before students have enough knowledge about the field can create concern over future academic curriculum. On the other hand, Cora did an internship after she graduated and was very desperate to find any internship or job that she could do to make a living. She explained, "I did not even think about doing an internship when I was in school!" Neither Jessa nor Cora's decisions about doing internships were guided by academic advisors. Therefore, academic advisors can play an important role in guiding students in terms of timing and appropriateness of internship experiences to help students make more informed decisions regarding their internships.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The importance of internship programs and the potential benefits have led to additions and expansions of internship programs in many organizations. This study sought to increase theoretical understanding of students' internship experiences, specifically, their assimilation processes during internships; by doing so, internship stage models can better predict successful internships because all three involved parties – students, host organizations, and academic programs – benefit from offering/participating in successful internship programs.

The study findings confirmed some of the expected results as discussed in the second chapter. First, Jablin's (1987, 2001) organizational assimilation model does provide a helpful theoretical guide to understand student interns' socialization experiences. Second, anticipatory socialization – both vocational and organizational anticipatory socialization – is critical for students and should be included in existing internship stage models. Third, as existing literature explains about full-time members (i.e., Feldman, 1977; Jablin, 1987), interactions with incumbents are critical for interns as well; but, it was also found that students utilize more passive strategies and tend to rely on indirect interactions/observations to learn about organizational culture. Lastly, identifying when interns make the transition into metamorphosis is difficult. Students did show indications of high levels of assimilation as expected, although majority of them did not make the transition into metamorphosis.

Further, there were findings that were not originally expected but made important theoretical and practical implications. First, during the encounter stage, students are more likely to be socialized through adaptive behavior to organizational norms, rather than individualizing their work to meet their needs. This preference for socialization is likely due to interns' lack of professional experiences. Second, students dealt with more uncertainties throughout their

internships than recognized by existing literature (i.e., Diambra et al., 2004; Knouse et al., 1999). In order to overcome uncertainties, interns benefit from having clear and specific communication with employers. For example, discussing issues such as compensation for work, requesting an exit debriefing, and clearly explaining full-time job offers were important topics that interns struggled with in this study. Lastly, it was found that students do not have abilities to understand their host organizations' identity during the short term of their internship, but they are able to describe organizational culture. While this study offers important theoretical and practical findings, it is not without limitations. The following section discusses the study's limitations and future directions.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

One of the strengths of this study is that it took a comprehensive look at all the stages of the organizational assimilation process. However, since participants had already completed their internships, they had to recall past experiences in order to answer the interview questions. For example, when asked about the application processes and what they learned about the organization, several participants had some difficulty differentiating at what point in time they learned organizational information. Since organizational assimilation is a process by which individuals become integrated into the culture of organizations (Jablin, 2001; Waldeck & Myers, 2007), future research needs to examine members' experience as their assimilation progresses in order to capture the fresh interpretation and memories. Thus, conducting a longitudinal study that follows students' internship process from searching and applying for an internship to exiting the host organization would provide less reflective data.

While the goal of this study was to broadly collect unique stories and personalized interpretations of students' internship experiences through a qualitative methodology, this also

affected the similarities and differences between participants. It was found that the size of an organization influences student interns' assimilation processes. For example, Monte and Jason's host organizations were international corporations with numerous branches across the country; thus these companies were able to invest more time and money in their internship programs compared to smaller organizations. Therefore, future research would be able to tease out organizational differences by collecting a larger participant sample from interns in organizations that are similar in size and budget.

Another way to enhance understanding of internship programs would be to complete a dyadic study where both the intern and organizational mentor contribute information. Hearing perceptions from both parties and comparing internship supervisors' perspectives with those of student interns' would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the assimilation process. Potentially, dyadic data could provide richer and unbiased data to better understand internships.

Finally, since organizational identity is such a complex concept for interns to understand during the limited time period of an internship, they were not able to provide answers regarding organizational identity, instead describing organizational *culture*. This suggests that examining the intersections of organizational assimilation and organizational *culture* would provide a better theoretical frame for the following reasons. First, understanding organizational identity requires more time and full participation in all phases of organizational activities; students do not have the exposure to grasp organizational identity during the limited internship period. Second, organizational assimilation is defined as the process by which members become integrated into the *culture* of organizations (Jablin, 2001; Waldeck & Myers, 2007); therefore, students' perceptions of organizational *culture* will have more bearing on their assimilation than organizational identity.

Thus, designing research that explores the relationship between newcomers' perceptions of organizational culture and their levels of assimilation would be more suitable in adding meaningful information to the theoretic literature. Further, since the increasing importance of internships and demand for part-time or temporary employment has become an international trend (Barling & Gallagher, 1996), comparing organizational cultures among different countries would enhance understanding of short-term internship work. Despite its limitations, this study provided important implications for organizational assimilation and organizational identity, contributing to scholarly understanding of internships.

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## Participants' Profiles

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Internship Period</b>	<b>Organization Description</b>
1	Kristin	F	Master's Student	Biology	Summer 2009, Winter 2011 At the same organization <i>(Paid)</i>	An engineering firm with about 30 employees and one intern in the office
2	Jenny	F	Junior	Communication & Leadership Studies	Fall 2010 – present <i>(Paid)</i>	A non-profit institute on college campus with three full-time staff and four interns
3	Martin	M	Senior	Marketing	Spring 2012 <i>(Paid)</i>	A local branch of an international invest services company with one financial advisor in the office
4	Lisa	F	Junior	Communication & Business Administration	Summer 2011, Spring 2012 At two different organizations <i>(Unpaid)</i>	1) A local branch of a non-profit organization with four full-time staff and one intern 2) A school district office with one intern (the total number of staff not specified)
5	Cora	F	A business consultant since July 2011	Business (Graduated in December, 2010)	January - July 2011 <i>(Paid)</i>	An international consulting firm with three full-time staff and four interns
6	Monte	M	Senior	East Asian Language and Culture & Global Studies	Summer 2012 <i>(Paid)</i>	A branch of a major corporation with approximately 75,000 employees in the country. Total ten interns were hired by a department within the corporate branch
7	Noah	M	Senior	Animal Sciences	Summer 2010-2012 <i>(Unpaid in 2010-2011, Paid in 2012)</i>	A state zoo with approximately 100 zookeepers. Interned in the zoo's nutrition lab with two full-time researchers for three consecutive summers
8	Jessa	F	Junior	Accounting	Summer 2012 <i>(Paid)</i>	A regional CPA firm with one main office and three satellite offices in different locations. Interned at the main office.
9	Erin	F	Senior	Communication Studies	Summer 2012 <i>(Unpaid)</i>	One of the largest radio broadcasting companies in

						the US with 15 summer interns (the number of employees was not specified)
10	Jason	M	Senior	Communication Studies	Summer 2012 <i>(Paid)</i>	Multinational manufacturer and marketer of consumer-branded meat and food products. Twenty-four summer interns in different departments.
11	Ally	F	Senior	Communication Studies	Summer 2012 <i>(Paid)</i>	A small, young non-profit organization with 10-12 people in the office. Two interns working at different hours (Ally was paid and the other intern was unpaid)
12	Garrett	F	Senior	Communication Studies	Summer 2012 <i>(Unpaid)</i>	A real estate office with five agents and one intern (the internship position was newly created for Garrett)
13	Hannah	F	Senior	Communication Studies & Conflict Management	Fall 2011 <i>(Paid)</i>	A small consulting firm with 12 consultants, two staff, and one intern (the internship position was created upon Hannah's request)

## Interview Questions

**RQ1.** How do student interns experience the organizational assimilation process during the limited time period of their internship?

### *Before Internship: Anticipatory Socialization*

- Could you describe the process of finding the internship position?
- What were your initial expectations about the organization and the internship program? What influenced your expectations?
- How much did you know about the organization, and what helped you learn about the organization?
- If you did not know a lot about the organization, how did it make you feel before joining the organization as an intern? How did the uncertainties affect you and how much/what kind of efforts did you make in order to lower the uncertainties?
- How much contact did you have with people from the organization? What were your interactions with the recruiters like? How did it influence your expectations?

### *During Internship: Encounter-Metamorphosis*

- Could you describe how the first day or week of the internship went and if there were orientations or trainings?
- How did the recruiters or employers help you learn about the organization? Also, how did they treat you throughout the internship period (any examples of your interactions with them)?
- How similar or different was the organization from your initial expectations?
- When and how much did you feel like you were part of the organization, and why?
- If you worked with other interns, how was your relationship with them?
- Could you describe the scope of your work as an intern and how you felt about the tasks you completed?
- Could you explain whether/how the employers gave you feedback/evaluations, and how you felt about it?
- How much did you feel that you were contributing to the organization, and when/why? How confident were you with accomplishing given tasks?
- How do you think the organization benefited from having you as an intern?



- How much/what kind of efforts did you think that the organization made for the internship program?
- Overall, how satisfied/disappointed were you with your internship experience?
- How do you think the internship experience will contribute to your career development?

***End of Internship: Exit***

- How did things change toward the end of internship (relationships with organizational members and your attitude, etc.) and what was your last day of your internship like?
- How did the employers or coworkers talk about their company when talking to you or other interns? How did that affect your thoughts about the organization?
- How did you feel about ending the internship?
- How did the organization help you be ready to exit the organization?
- What did you think you learned the most from your internship experience towards the end of the internship?

**RQ2. How are interns' perceptions of organizational identity shaped throughout the internship experience, and how does it influence their assimilation?**

- Can you describe the organization's key characteristics/atmosphere (using adjectives)?
- How did your understanding of the organization's characteristics/atmosphere influence your overall internship experience and relationships with other members?
- What kind of things contributed to your understanding of the organization's identity?
- Do you see yourself becoming a full-time member of the organization, and if so, why? How similar/different do you think a full-time work experience would be from your internship experience?