

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

How to Create and Pilot a Successful VA Internship Program for Students from Historically Excluded Groups in Under a Year

HSR&D Cyberseminar

March 15, 2022

For inquiries please contact:

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DISCLOSURES

We have no conflicts of interest.

Views are our own and do not necessarily represent those of VA or the US government.



PRESENTERS



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Ci2i: Center for Innovation to Implementation (Ci2i), VA Palo Alto HERC: VA Health Economics Resource Center
PERC: VA Program Evaluation Resource Center



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Program Staff

- Cora Bernard (PERC)
- Jessica Breland (Ci2i)
- Ann Combs (PERC/Ci2i)
- Carla Garcia (HERC)
- Cindie Slightam (Ci2i)

- Funders

- Center for Innovation to Implementation (Ci2i), VA Palo Alto
- Health Economic Resource Center (HERC)

- Mentors

- Ann Combs (PERC/Ci2i)
- Elizabeth Oliva (PERC/Ci2i)
- Christine Timko (Ci2i)



AGENDA

- Introduction
- Pre-implementation/Planning Activities
- Internship Activities
- Evaluation
- Final Thoughts



INTRODUCTION



Paid Internship for Bay Area Community College Students from Historically Excluded Groups



To increase the diversity within the pipeline of students who are exposed to health services research

Paid Internship for Bay Area Community College Students from Historically Excluded Groups





HISTORICALLY EXCLUDED GROUPS

The term **historically excluded group or HEG** refers to any group of people that has been historically excluded from full rights, privileges and opportunities in a society or organization. This term is fluid dependent on time and location. As part of this program, not limited to, but including racial/ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ identified people, those with disabilities, first generation college students, generationally poor.

Adapted definition from National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF)



WHY IS A DIVERSE WORKFORCE IMPORTANT IN A HEALTHCARE SYSTEM LIKE THE VA?

Research across the continuum from preclinical to clinical and rehabilitation research to health services research requires **diversity in skill sets, experiences, and perspectives**. Scientists and trainees from diverse backgrounds and life experiences bring different perspectives, creativity, and individual enterprise to address complex health-related problems. There are many benefits that flow from a diverse VA-supported scientific workforce, including: fostering **scientific innovation**, enhancing global competitiveness, contributing to **robust learning environments**, improving the **quality of the research**, **advancing the likelihood that underserved or health disparity populations participate in, and benefit from health research**, and enhancing **public trust**.

Source: ORD Research Supplement to Increase Diversity (<https://www.research.va.gov/funding/ORD-Diversity-Supplement.docx>)



INTRODUCTION

To introduce and increase awareness of health services research and professional networks

Paid Internship for Bay Area Community College Students from Historically Excluded Groups



INTRODUCTION

To encourage applicants
who cannot afford
unpaid work



Paid Internship for Bay Area Community College Students from Historically Excluded Groups



To build a local pipeline
of health services
researchers for Ci2i and
beyond

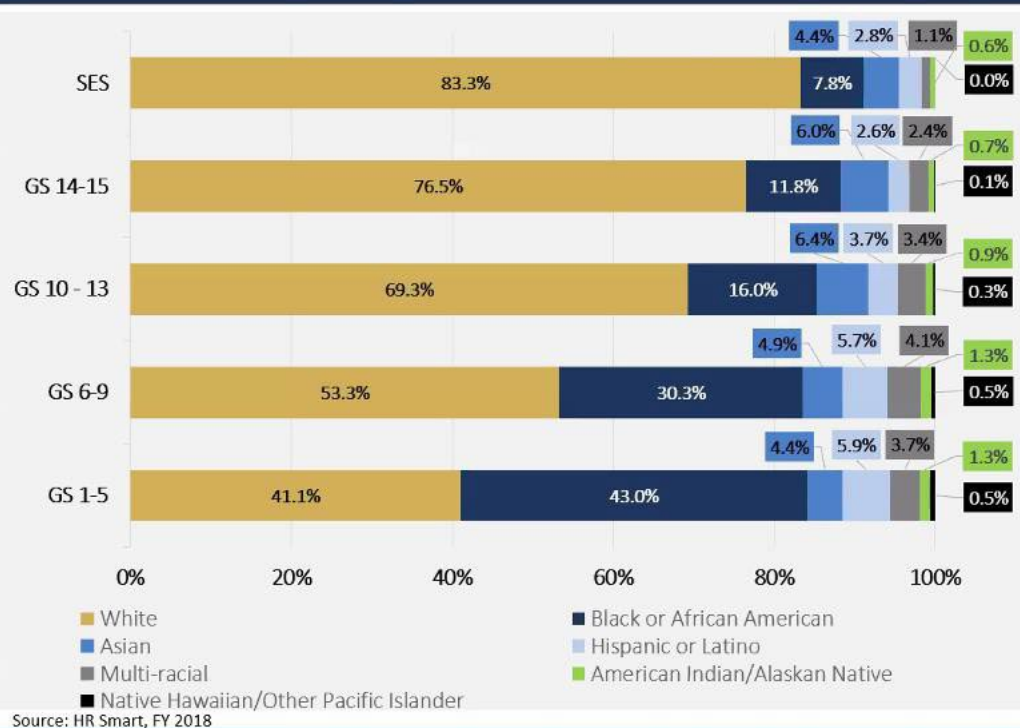
Paid Internship for Bay Area
Community College Students from
Historically Excluded Groups



WHY IS A DIVERSE WORKFORCE IMPORTANT IN A HEALTHCARE SYSTEM LIKE THE VA?

PowerPoint Slide Show - OAA keynote - PowerPoint

VHA Employees (Title 5 & Title 38 Hybrid) by Grade and Race/Ethnicity



Key Findings:

- The percentage of individuals who identify as White increases as grade increases
- The percentage of individuals who identify as Black or African American decreases as grade increases
- The percentage of individuals who identify as Hispanic or Latino decreases as grade increases
- The percentage of individuals who identify as Asian increases through GS 10 – 13 then decreases through SES

Disclaimer:

- Data includes Title 5 and Title 38 Hybrid employees

Source: Kameron Matthews, MD, JD; VA Minority Summit Conference, 2021



- Expose students to health services research
- Inspire and aid students' academic and professional careers
- Provide an opportunity for students to envision themselves in a research setting at VA
- Increase diversity in VA research pipeline



PRE-IMPLEMENTATION / PLANNING ACTIVITIES



What makes this internship unique?

- Communities we serve
 - Local community college students from HEG
- 6-week part time summer program (20 hours/week)
- Conduit to other VA internships
 - Pathways & National Diversity Internship Program
- Met students where they were
 - Tips and tricks for non-admitted students
 - Student-driven discussions
- Built-in curriculum
- Cohort experience





RECRUITMENT AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITH COMMUNITY COLLEGES

How did we recruit?

- Recruited from 13 Bay Area community colleges
- Connected with deans, department chairs, counseling services (EOPS, honors program)
- Emailed professors from classes such as Psychology, Sociology, Research and Statistical Methods
- Attended virtual career fair (most effective)
 - All attendees applied





ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Enrolled in a community college for their first degree
- Minimum 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale
- Completed at least 1 eligible course in
 - allied health sciences
 - research methods
 - statistics
- Self-identified member of an historically excluded group
- Computer and internet access for virtual internship program





APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS & REVIEW

- 40 eligible applications (63 total)
 - 23 ineligible due to having an undergraduate degree, not meeting program eligibility or missing documents
- Application materials
 - Transcripts
 - 1 Letter of recommendation
 - Responses to 3 essay questions
 - Resume (if applicable)
- Reviewing applications
 - Deidentified eligible applications
 - 7 reviewers
 - Offered internships to 6 students





Interns' Self-Identification (based on the NIH definition)

- *Generationally poor*
- *First generation college students*
- *Racial and ethnic groups from marginalized communities*
- *LGBTQIA+*
- *Individuals with disabilities*



ONBOARDING & FUNDING

- Onboarding
 - Vendorization/Consultants
 - Register as federal contractors
 - DUNS number & SAM registration
 - Letter of Agreement
 - Limitations
 - **No access to VA servers or data**
 - Stipend of \$2,500
 - Book purchase
 - \$50 allocated in the budget



INTERNSHIP PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION



Local VA Stakeholder Buy-In

- Received a lot of interest from staff at HSR&D COIN, Health Economics Resource Center (HERC), and the National Center for PTSD to be a part of the internship
 - Over 2 dozen affiliated VA staff and PIs were involved in the internship (not including committee)





MENTOR ACTIVITIES (~10 HOURS)

- Individualized based on student interest and mentor's available projects
- Weekly check-ins
- Attended project and team meetings
- Read/discussed journal articles and conducted literature reviews
- Reviewed and assisted with manuscript preparation
- Developed personal statements and/or identified additional opportunities for research experience (for transferring students)





SPECIAL TOPIC DISCUSSIONS & PANELS

• **18 Presenters** from Ci2i, HERC, NCPTSD & Other VA Programs

Research Topics (optional pre-reading)

1. How to read a science article (Hoda Magid)
2. Tech into Care (Jeane Bosch/Colleen Becket Davenport)
3. Implementation science overview (Donna Zulman)
4. Implementation science and health equity (Jessica Breland)
5. Social determinants of health (Rebecca Matteo)
6. Introduction to data science (Cora Bernard)
7. The economics of unpaid care (Jo Jacobs)
8. Introduction to qualitative methods (Carrie Gray)
9. VA LGBTQ Vet suicide program (Joseph Goulet/Allison Warren)
10. Research and policy (Keith Humphreys)
11. Health economics (Todd Wagner)
12. Ci2i health services research (Steven Asch)
13. Critical race theory and medicine (Edwin Lindo)



Career and Future Opportunities

1. What is mentorship (Megha Shankar)
2. How to create a CV & resume (Cindie Slightam)
3. VA Pathways & NDIP internships (Daisy Witherspoon & Glenda Fuller)
4. Funding resources in college (Carla Garcia & Elizabeth Oliva)

Professional Development Panels

1. How to cultivate professional relationships
2. Moving towards balance
3. Managing professional identities



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS & CO-CHAIRING RESEARCH SESSIONS

- Interns chaired select presentations, which included gathering:
 - Biography and research background
 - Title of presenter's talk
 - Questions on deck for the Q&A
- 1:1 informational interviews to inform chair role & learn about the speakers career/background
 - 30 mins over Zoom, initiated by interns
 - Encouraged to meet with others at VA as recommended by mentor or based on the interest



FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Topics:

1. Anxiety & Depression Prevalence Among College Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic
2. Long-Term Benzo Use & Discontinuation Among Patients at VA
3. Ci2i Internship Reflections: QUERI Roadmap
4. Project Review & Program Reflections: Anti-Harassment Project
5. Effects on Caregivers of Individuals with Mental Illness



EVALUATION



MEANS OF EVALUATION

- **Special Topic Discussion Series evaluations (interns, presenters)**
- **Pre- and post-surveys on comprehension, familiarity, and experience (interns)**
- Mid-program mentorship survey (interns)
- Exit interview/program debrief (interns, mentors)



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→ The internship met, and even exceeded, its aims.



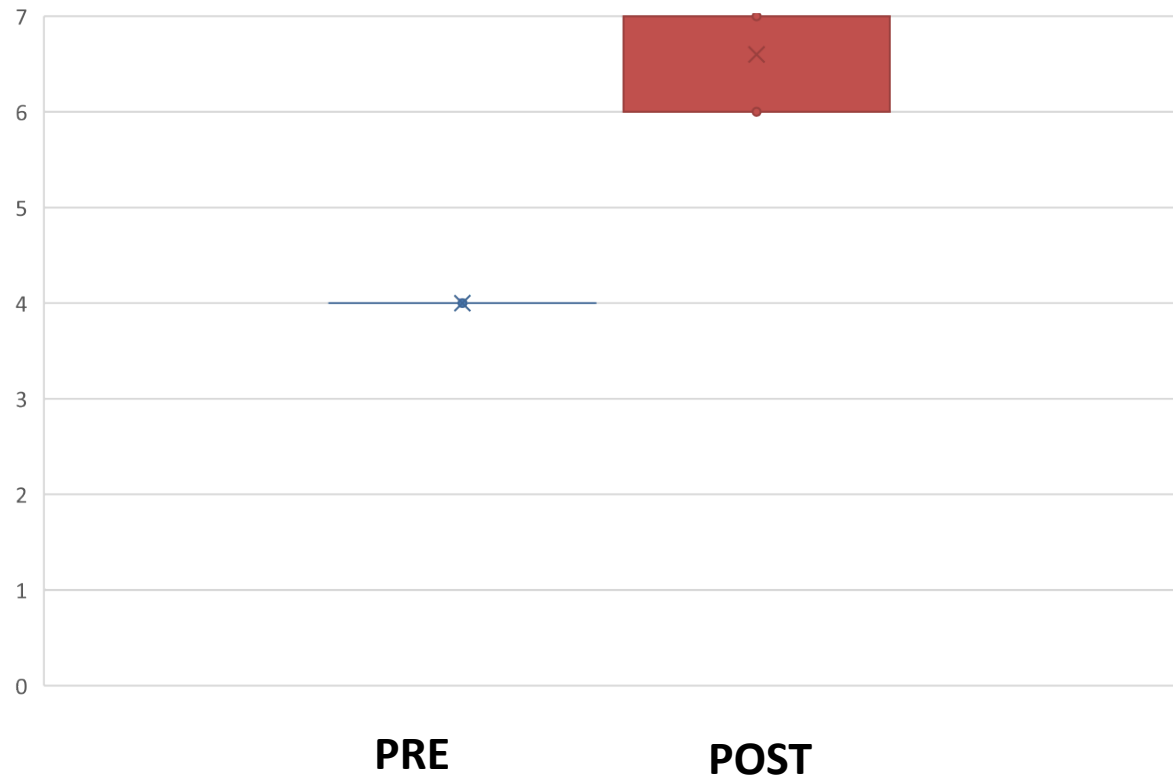
SPECIAL TOPIC DISCUSSION: INTERN FEEDBACK

- The session on how to read a research article was so incredibly helpful. Her passion also shown through which **sparked passion** in myself. She was **thorough and very clear**. While research articles can be a bit intimidating, it was **challenging but wasn't uncomfortable**. I gained so much from this presentation.
- This was excellent - This also **made me realize** that I am much more interested in implementation research than efficacy research but prior to this presentation I didn't know there was a difference.
- This was excellent! I thought this info was presented in a down-to-earth but **accessible** way, and really liked the thoughtful puzzles...Kudos - this was really **fun and interesting**.
- This was awesome! It felt very **personal and relatable but also professional**. **I'm always surprised to see people who seem so far ahead of anything I could achieve having similar backgrounds to mine.**
- Very much enjoyed seeing this side of the work the VA might do and it definitely was thought provoking...As always I like that we got to learn these concepts in a **tangible, applicable** way which makes their value clear.



PRE/POST: EXPOSURE TO RESEARCH

I HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF A BROAD RANGE OF AREAS AND TOPICS IN HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH

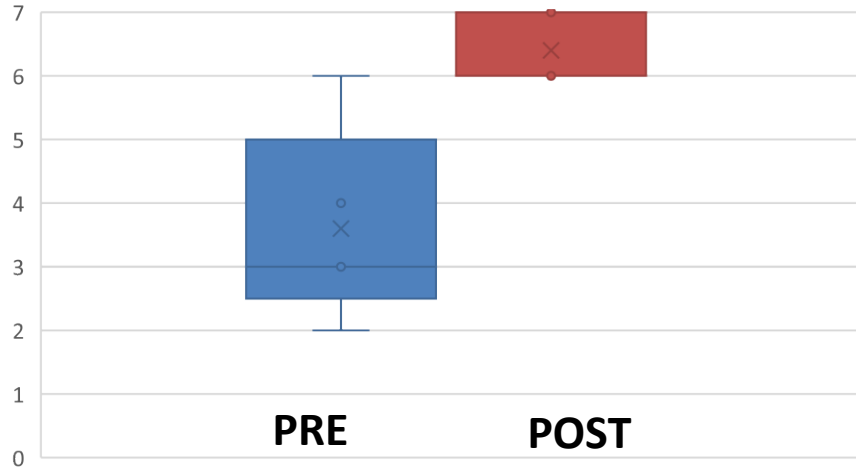


- 7 – Strongly agree
- 4 – Moderately agree
- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 0 – No basis for assessment

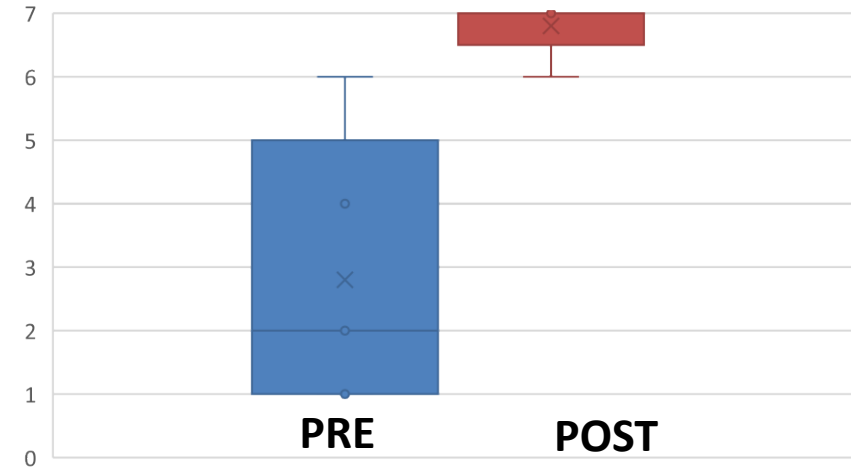


PRE/POST: EXPOSURE TO RESEARCH

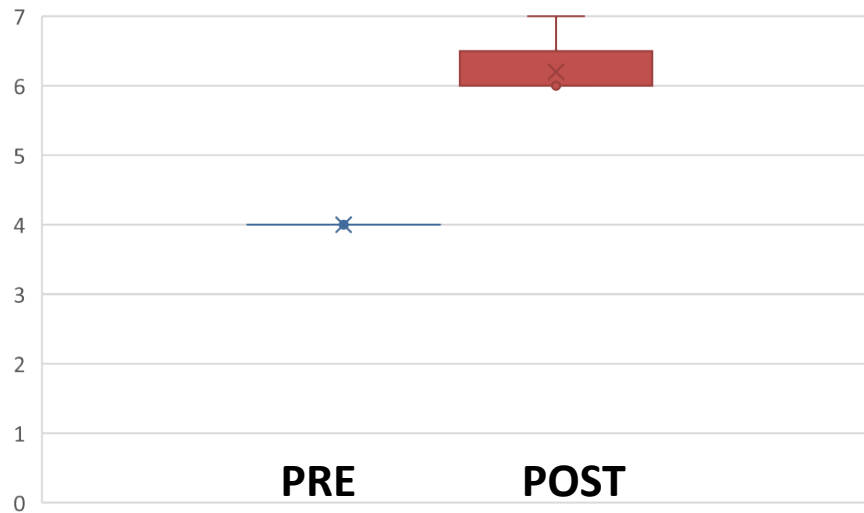
LITERATURE REVIEW



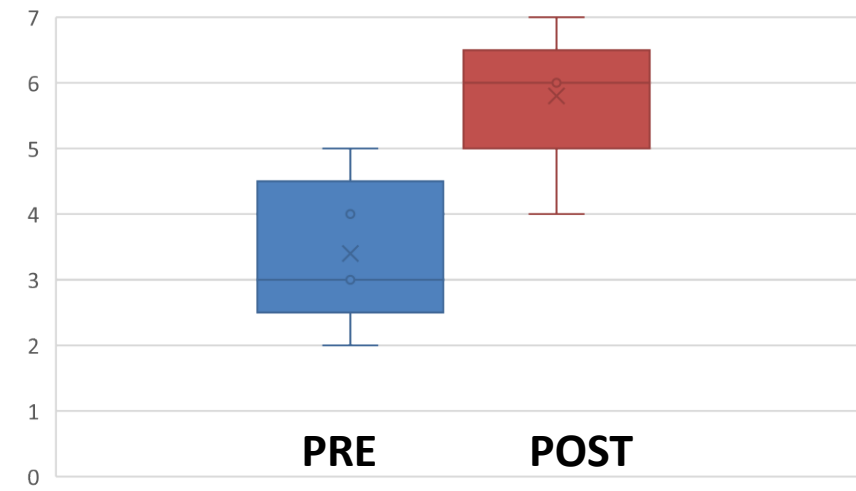
PRESENTING TO A PEER AUDIENCE



DISSECTING RESEARCH ARTICLES



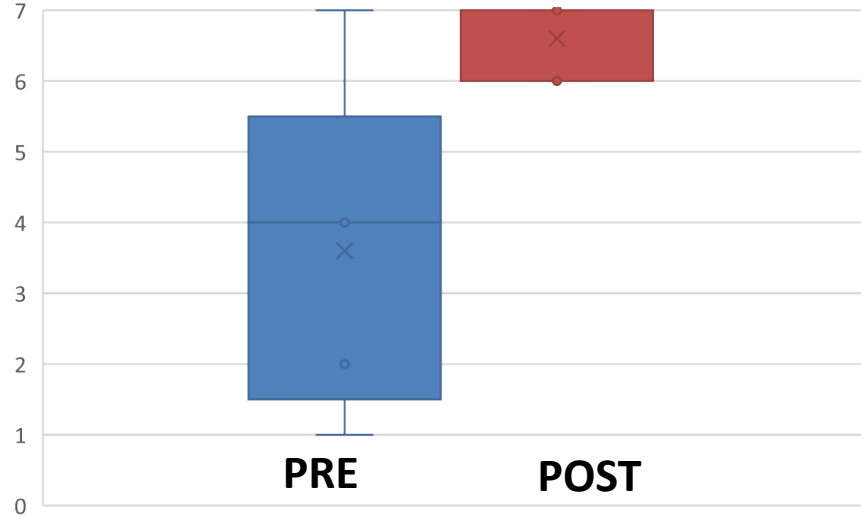
DISCUSSING RESEARCH WITH EXPERIENCED RESEARCHERS



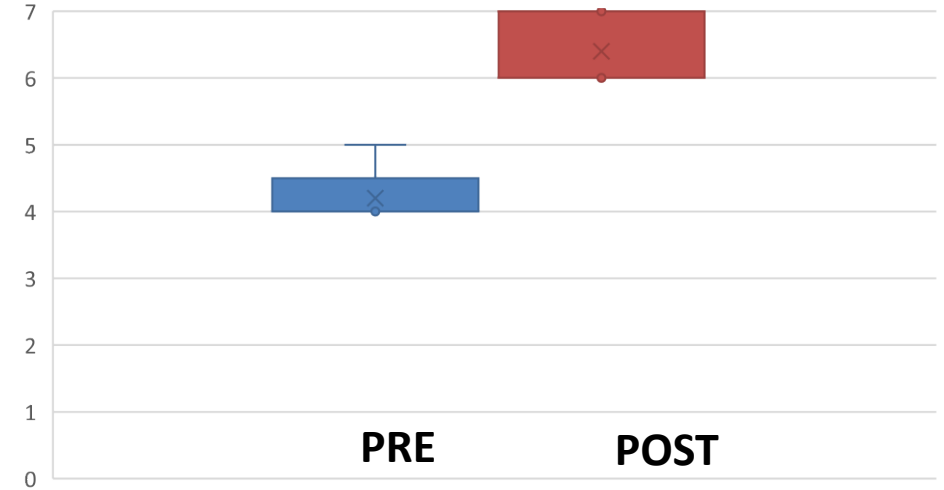


PRE/POST: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

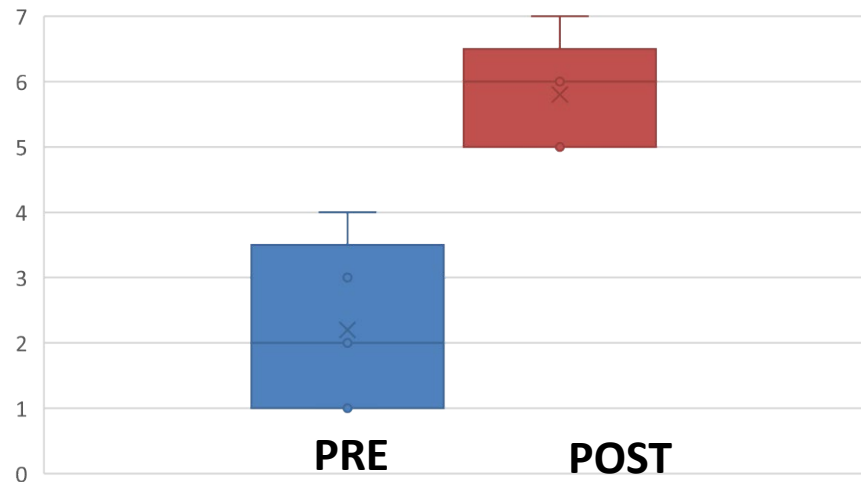
INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS



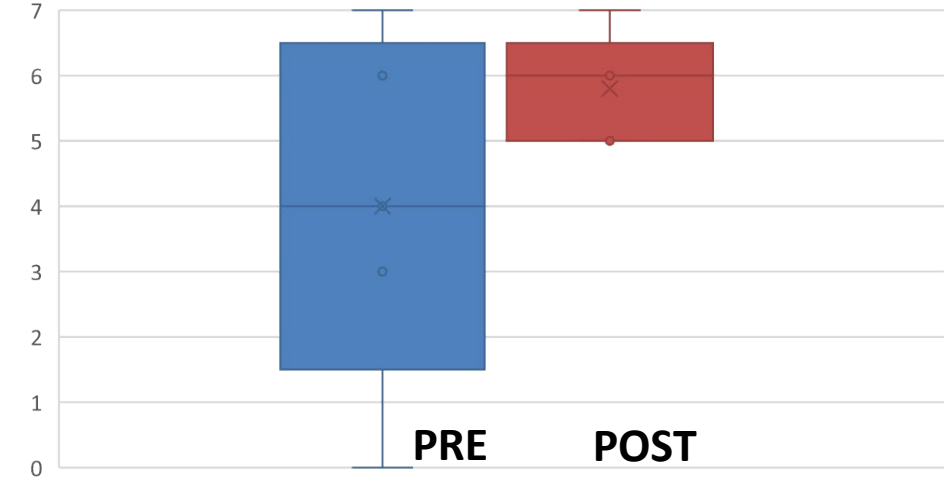
IDENTIFY AND APPLY FOR FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES



CONSTRUCTING A CV



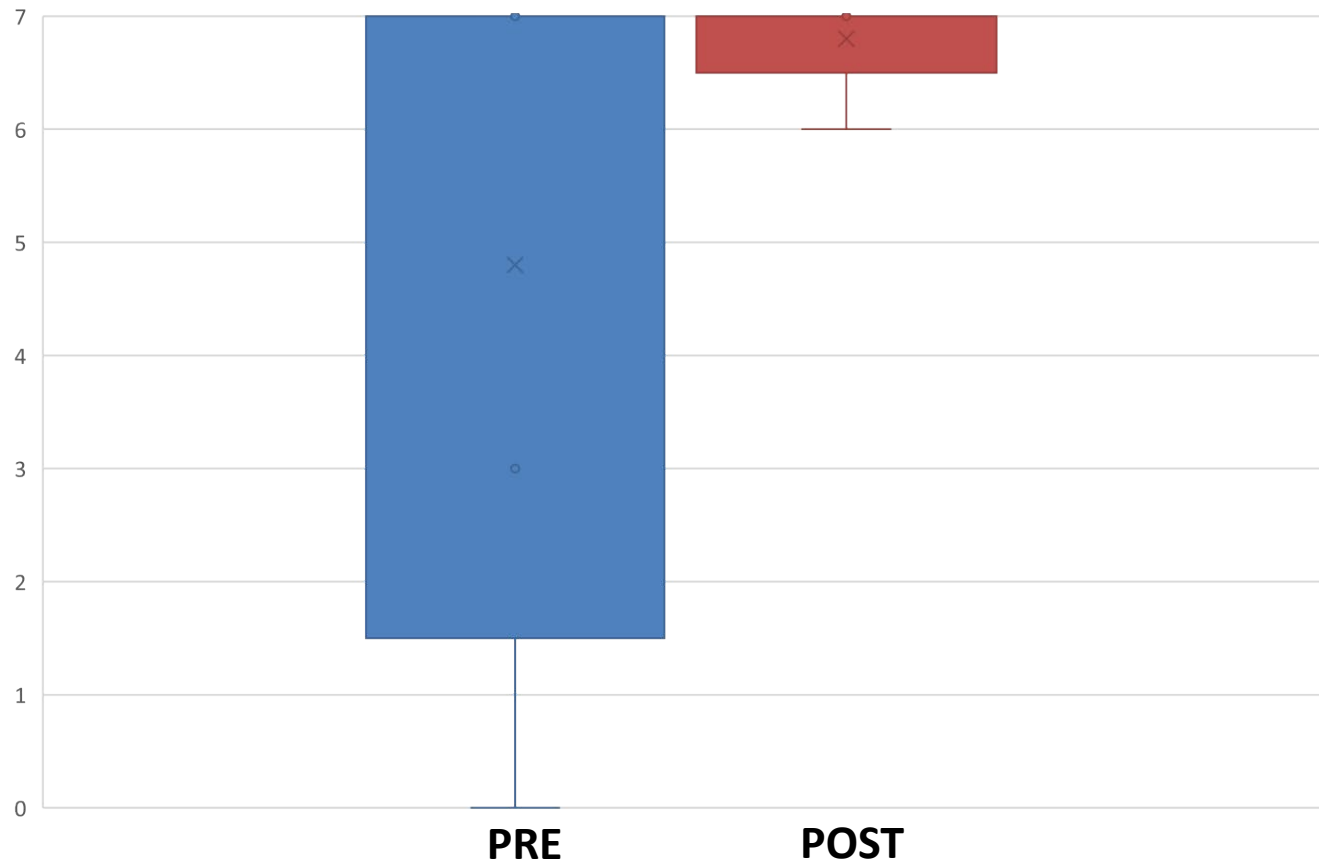
EQUIPPED TO PURSUE NEXT STEPS IN CAREER





PRE/POST: VA PIPELINE

THE ORGANIZERS ARE RESPECTFUL OF MY TIME AND MAKE ME FEEL WELCOME AND VALUED

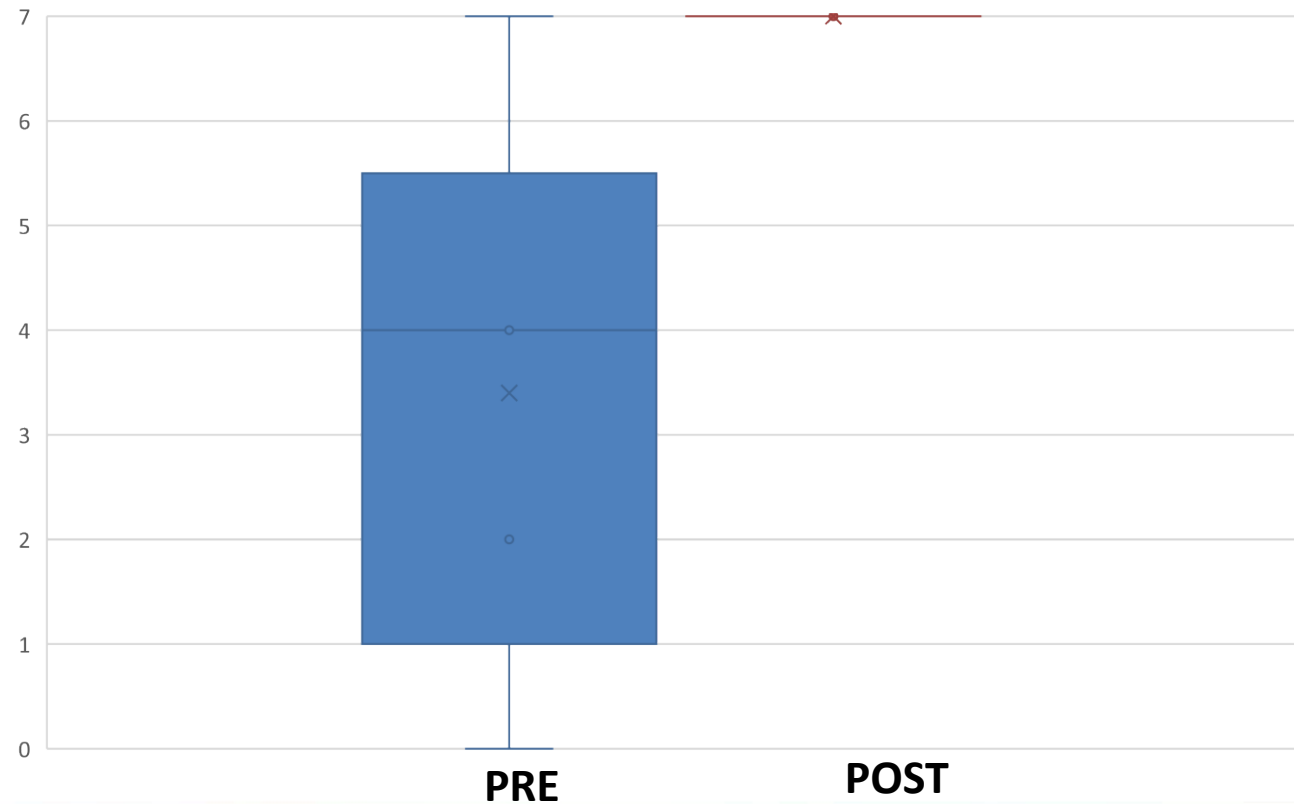


7 – Strongly agree
4 – Moderately agree
1 – Strongly disagree
0 – No basis for assessment



PRE/POST: VA PIPELINE

SOMEONE WITH MY BACKGROUND AND LIFE EXPERIENCE WOULD GENERALLY FEEL WELCOME IN HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH

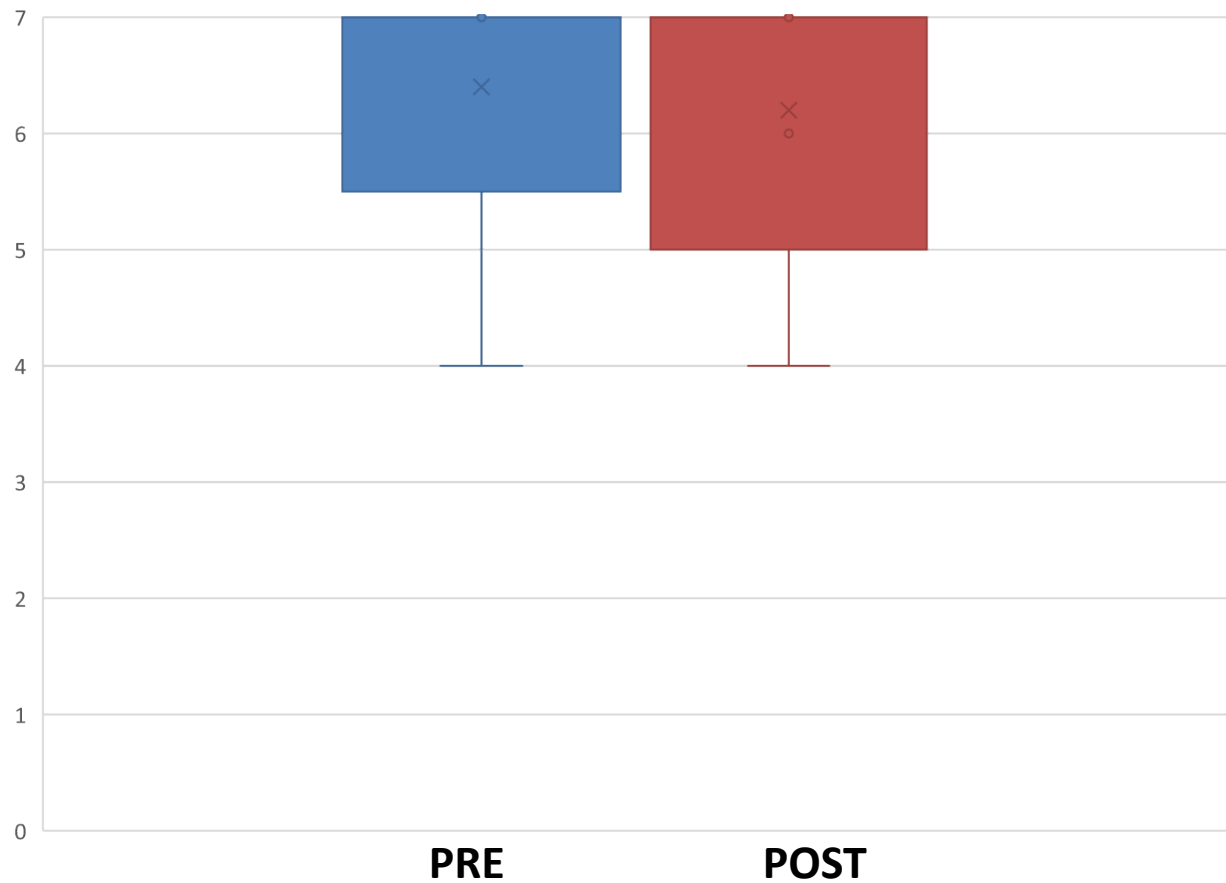


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PRE/POST: VA PIPELINE

I CAN PICTURE MYSELF PURSUING A CAREER IN HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH

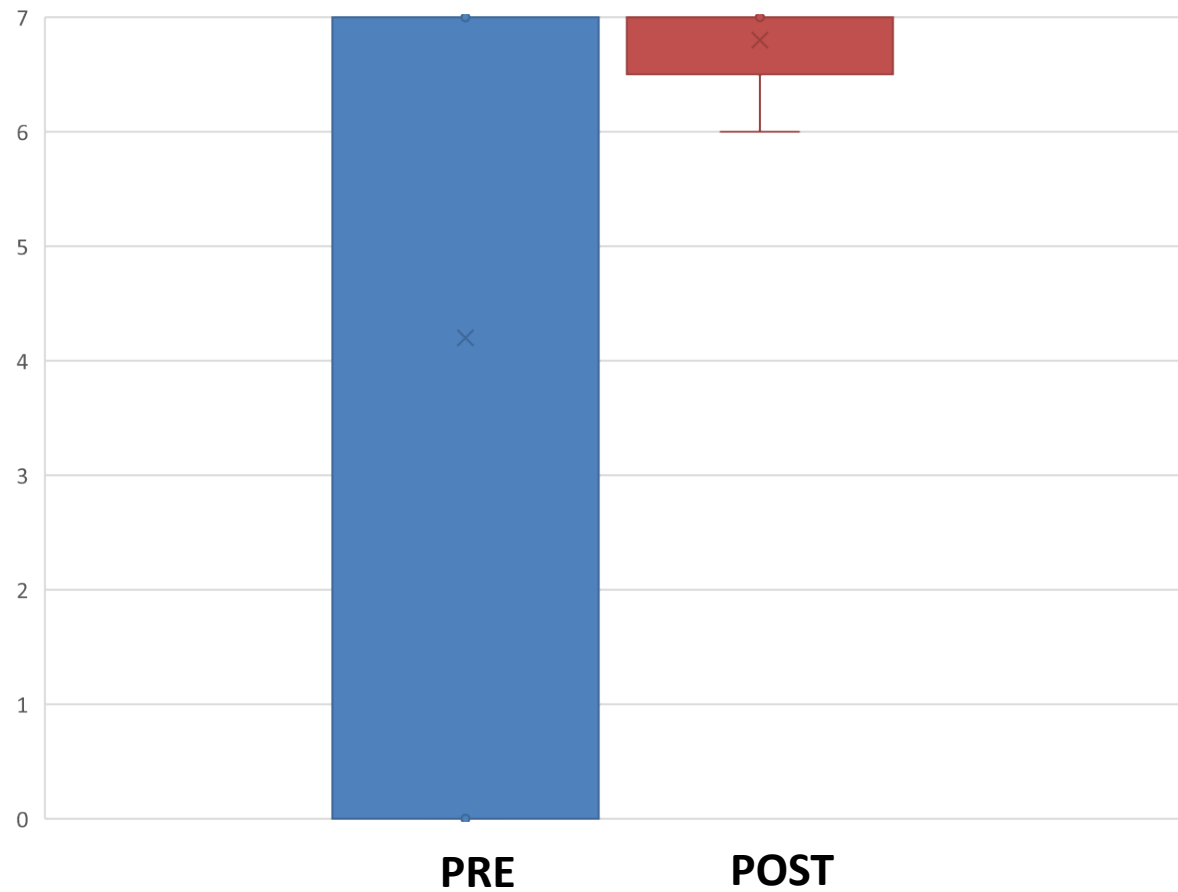


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PRE/POST: VA PIPELINE

THIS PROGRAM BETTER POSITIONED ME TO ACHIEVE MY ACADEMIC GOALS

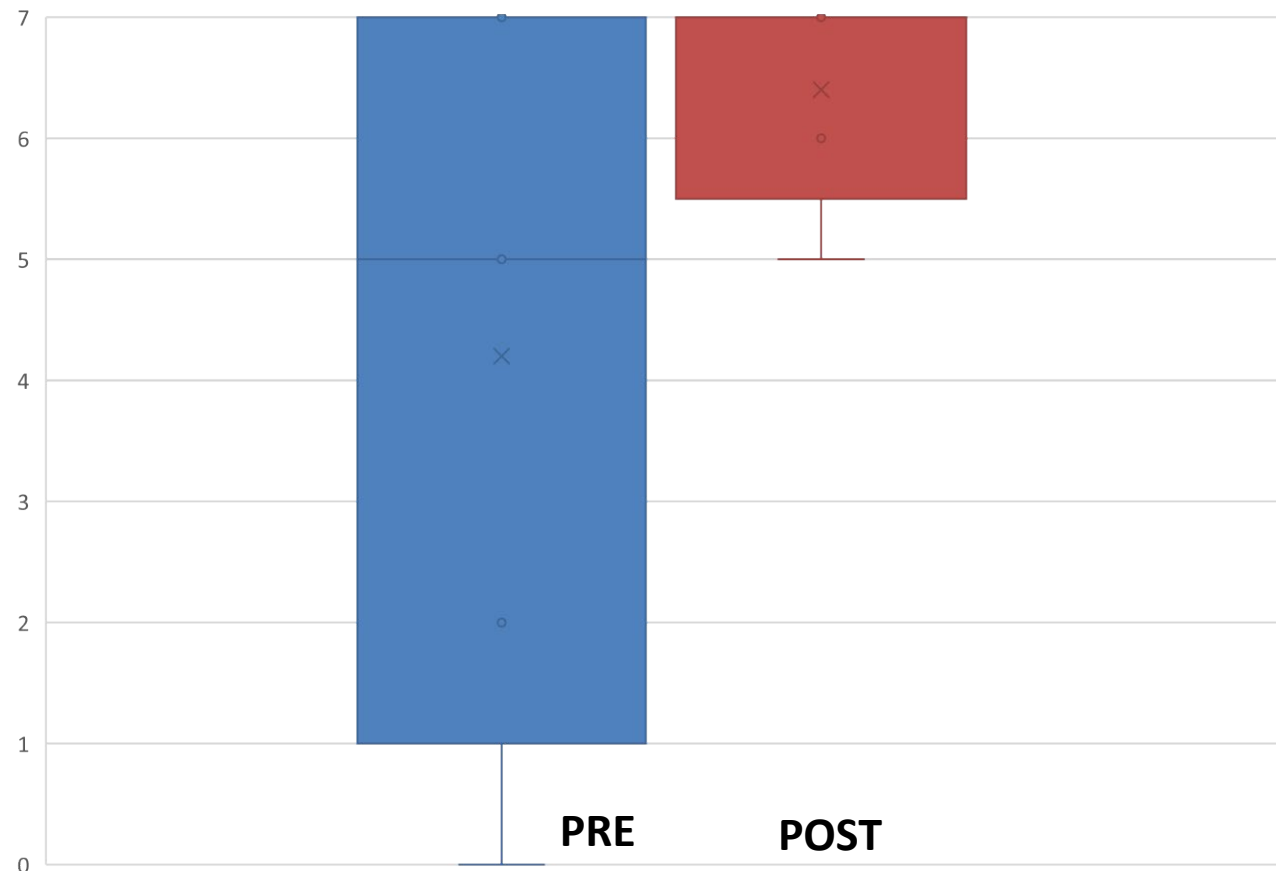


7 – Strongly agree
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1 – Strongly disagree
0 – No basis for assessment



PRE/POST: VA PIPELINE

I AM INTERESTED IN PURSUING EMPLOYMENT WITH THE VA



7 – Strongly agree
4 – Moderately agree
1 – Strongly disagree
0 – No basis for assessment



REFLECTIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS



REFLECTIONS ON OUR SUCCESS

- Effort and Time Investment
 - Recruitment
 - Application and selection process
 - Onboarding students
 - Scheduling & facilitating discussions and panels
- Mentorship
- Student management





NEXT STEPS

Cultivating relationships with internal & external partners

- Across VAs
- Local VA
 - Non-bachelor PD
- Community colleges
- Interns
 - Continued work with mentors
 - Letters of rec and life updates
 - Program alumni





KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Successful in meeting our aims
 - Long term investment
- Highly effective / low cost
- Pipeline is only part of the issue in improving diversity, equity, and inclusion



GRATITUDE

Thank you to everyone who participated, showed interest, and supported the internship.

Thank You!



QUESTIONS?

VHAPALCi2iDEIInternship@va.gov