



# The Program Evaluation and Education Research (PEER) Internship Program for Undergraduate Students

*A Friday Institute Equity-Mindedness Initiative*

Year 2 Evaluation Report

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## Acknowledgements

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## **Abstract**

This report details the impact of the Program Evaluation and Education Research (PEER) Internship Program for Undergraduate Students during the 2021-22 academic year and provides recommendations for program improvement.



## Executive Summary

The goal of the Program Evaluation and Education Research (PEER) Internship Program for Undergraduate Students is to broaden undergraduate access to educational research and evaluation while supporting the development of students' transferable skills and creating a pathway for future researchers, particularly for underrepresented groups. Additionally, the program seeks to enhance operations within the Friday Institute PEER Group. Findings revealed that interns gained an understanding of the environment and expectations of educational research, strengthened their transferable skills, and the PEER Internship program proved to be a cost-effective and sustainable option for enhancing PEER group operations.

### Year 2 Evaluation Findings

**1. How, and to what extent, did the PEER internship program expose interns to the environment and expectations of educational research and evaluation?**

Interns clarified and refined their understanding of educational research and evaluation through the practical application of relevant research and evaluation tasks. As interns contributed to real-world projects, they gained confidence in performing research and evaluation tasks.

**2. How, and to what extent, did the PEER internship program develop interns' transferable workforce skills?**

All interns reported increased capacity with their technical and soft skills. Interns' most significant perceived technical skills growth areas included the Boolean search method for literature reviews, cleaning data, data analysis, and written communication. The majority of interns showed effort and competence while producing outstanding work.

### 3. How, and to what extent, did the PEER internship program enhance PEER Group operations?

Assigning entry-level research tasks to interns enabled PEER Group members to concentrate on more challenging aspects of research projects. As interns gain more time and experience in the program, they are able to manage increasingly difficult tasks. The internship program is a cost-effective, sustainable pathway for preparing future educational researchers and evaluators from diverse backgrounds.

## Recommendations

- **Develop a framework for holding PEER interns accountable.** This includes creating protocols for interns to communicate challenges they may be facing and having stop-out procedures in place for interns that need to exit the program.
- **Establish an efficient system for assigning tasks that includes a weekly meeting schedule.** Undergraduates expressed a need for clearly established deadlines for completing tasks. Additionally, weekly meetings would give interns an opportunity to check-in, ask questions, and strengthen relationships with one another.
- **Incorporate opportunities for partnership, mentorship, and collaboration.** Including more voices and perspectives from within the PEER Group and the Friday Institute can help improve program design and impact. Moreover, all interns expressed a desire for more collaboration.
- **Maximize recruitment efforts and provide explicit internship expectations.** It is essential to ensure interns are aware of the duties associated with the internship and are motivated to participate in the experience. Strengthening the recruitment process can ensure a good fit between the program and interns.



# Introduction

## Program Summary

The Program Evaluation and Education Research (PEER) Internship for Undergraduate Students is an evidence-based and equity-focused student development program that introduces undergraduate students of all majors to educational evaluation and research. The program partners with the Federal Work-Study program to provide paid immersive professional development for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Interns receive ongoing training in educational research and evaluation techniques while contributing to PEER Group projects. Key features of the program include hybrid work and flexible scheduling, mentoring and coaching, culminating projects, and iterative program assessment. The program launched in summer 2020, during the height of the pandemic. Details about the first year of program implementation are available in the [pilot evaluation report](#).

Following the pilot evaluation report, several changes were made to strengthen program implementation including,

### Recruitment

- Incorporation of a more targeted and detailed application process that explicitly outlined job responsibilities and expectations and required references and a short answer response
- Inclusion of a selection committee to assist with reviewing prospective intern applications and interviewing prospective interns

### Structure & Accountability

- Development of a Lead Intern role with explicit yet right-sized tasks to develop and enhance leadership skills
- Creation of an intern availability spreadsheet to enable more transparency and accountability around when interns are available to work
- Established a streamlined PEER Intern Task Assignment Log to better organize PEER Group needs and intern projects
- Increased hybrid options allowing interns to work both in-person and remotely
- Identified opportunities for disseminating the intern program work to the academic community
- The pairing of undergraduate and graduate students on research tasks
- Inclusion of a PEER Graduate Assistant to facilitate intern exit interviews and the focus group instead of the Internship Supervisor, thus eliminating power differences

### Intern Training & Resources

- Development of an intern training schedule with monthly themes
- Compilation of virtual asynchronous training menu for interns
- Integration of customized intern coaching and support

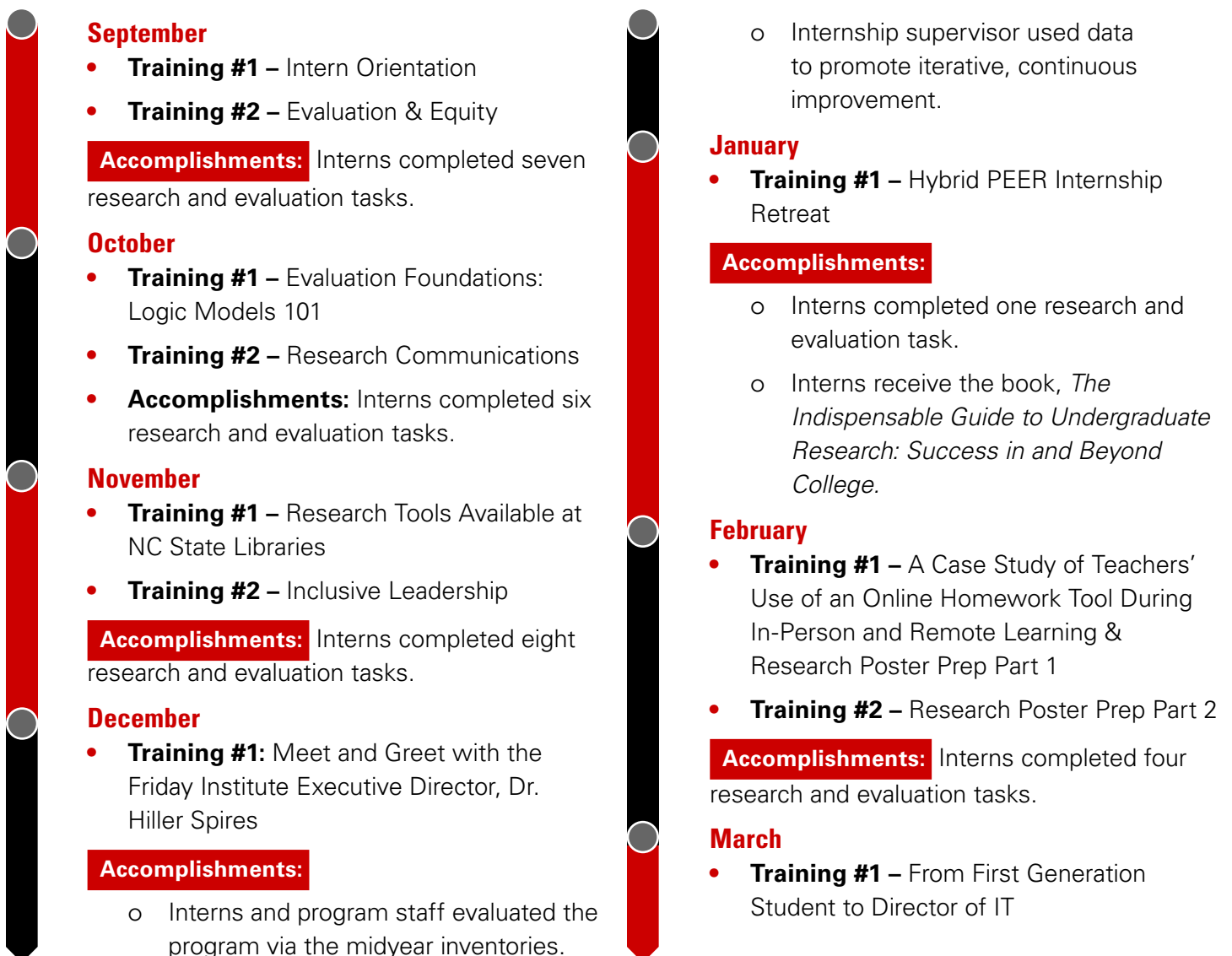


- Inviting more PEER Group members and FI staff/team members as guest speakers during PEER intern trainings, for example:
  - A conference recap segment inviting PEER Group members to share their recent conference presentations during PEER intern trainings
  - A careers segment inviting FI staff/team members to share about their career journeys during PEER intern trainings
- Each intern received the book - *The Indispensable Guide to Undergraduate Research: Success in and Beyond College*

This report details the program impact during its second year of implementation and provides recommendations for program improvement. Of note, in both years one and two, over 60% of interns identify as racial and ethnic minorities and first-generation college students.

## Program Timeline

The following timeline describes the program implementation for the 2021-2022 academic year:



- **Training #2** – Using and Transforming Math Education Pedagogy in a Broadcast Setting

**Accomplishments:** Interns create and presented a poster at the College of Education's virtual Celebration of Research event.

**April**

- **Training #1** – Graduate Research Assistant Student Panel
- **Training #2** – The Opportunity to Dream: How an Early Learning Network Implemented the Liberatory Design Process

**Accomplishments:**

- Interns completed six research and evaluation tasks.
- Interns complete their final blog posts and deliver their final presentations at their hybrid closing meeting.

**May**

**Accomplishments:** Interns and program staff evaluated the program via exit interviews, focus groups, and post program inventories.

Internship supervisor convenes a working group of program staff to inform data-driven decision making from Year 2 of program.

**Table 2: Intern Training Schedule Themes and Topics for 2021-2022**

Month	Training Theme	Topics Covered
September	Foundations of the Internship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome and Orientation to the Friday Institute/ the PEER Group</li> <li>• Internship Components and Expectations</li> <li>• Strategies for Success in the Internship</li> <li>• Communication in a Virtual Work Environment</li> <li>• Educational Equity</li> </ul>
October	Methodological Tools and Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Logic Models</li> <li>• Research Communications and Branding</li> <li>• Literature Reviews</li> <li>• Surveys/Qualtrics</li> </ul>
November	Research and Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive Leadership</li> <li>• Research Tools available at NCSU Libraries</li> </ul>
December	Tying it All Together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semester Wrap Up</li> <li>• Telling Your Story</li> <li>• Planning for Spring</li> </ul>
January	Foundations of the Internship - Part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Mission and Work of the Friday Institute</li> <li>• Goal Setting and Reflection</li> </ul>
February	Research Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conference Presentations</li> <li>• Research Posters</li> </ul>
March	Careers in Education and Beyond - Part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Navigating College and Career as a First Generation College Student</li> <li>• Education Research Career Pathways</li> </ul>
April	Careers in Education and Beyond - Part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life as a Graduate Research Assistant</li> <li>• Research Partnerships</li> <li>• Academic Year Wrap Up</li> </ul>

### **Sample Intern Tasks:**

- 1. CITI Trainings** – ongoing task to enable interns to be added to PEER Group IRBs, if needed,
- 2. Collecting/compiling email addresses** for sending survey or adding contact information to a spreadsheet,
- 3. Conducting interviews and focus groups,**
- 4. Creating breakout reports** – creating tables and charts from qualtrics surveys,
- 5. Creating memos** for assigned questions,
- 6. Creating research posters,**
- 7. Data entry/cleaning/reviewing,**
- 8. Open-ended survey items** simple response analysis,
- 9. Qualitative coding** of interviews and focus groups,
- 10. Reading IRB pdf** before assisting with data cleaning or collection,
- 11. Showing best practices of literature searching** – literature searching for equitable evaluation, STEM Identity,
- 12. Spanish translations** – of a consent form from English to Spanish and instrument, checking translation of a flier and instrument from English to Spanish,
- 13. Testing surveys** before launch and providing feedback,
- 14. Tight read and copy edit of Accelerate Rowan Evaluation report,**
- 15. Transcript cleaning**
- 16. Writing participant narratives**



## Evaluation Design

To assess program impact, evaluators employed a concurrent mixed method embedded design (DeCuir-Gunby, & Schutz, 2016) in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously from both PEER interns and team members who worked with them. The goal of this design was to provide a comprehensive and reliable understanding of the program impact from multiple stakeholder perspectives.

## Evaluation Questions

Three evaluation questions guided this investigation:

1. How, and to what extent, did the PEER internship program expose interns to the environment and expectations of educational research and evaluation?
2. How, and to what extent, did the PEER internship program develop interns' transferable workforce skills?
3. How, and to what extent, did the PEER internship program enhance PEER Group operations?

## Data Sources

Throughout the program year, a range of iterative, formative, and summative data sources were collected for a number of different purposes. To inform modifications during the year, pre- and mid-surveys, intern artifacts, and monthly memos were gathered throughout the program. Public Reports were also distributed to decision-makers throughout the year, and rapid analysis was done to facilitate rapid data-informed decision-making. At the conclusion of the program, data from interviews, focus groups, and post-surveys were gathered to help guide improvements for the following program year and contributed to summative analysis.

## Surveys

Throughout the program year, two types of surveys were administered via Qualtrics: (1) PEER Intern Surveys and (2) PEER Group Member and Graduate Assistant Surveys. More information about each type of survey is provided below. Each survey contained Likert Scale items, multiple choice, and open response questions. Due to the small sample size, survey responses were analyzed descriptively.

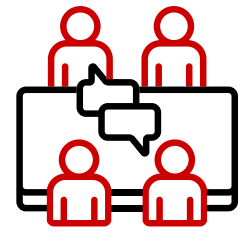


**PEER Intern Surveys.** Interns were surveyed at three times throughout the year: beginning, middle and end. Intern surveys were used to measure changes in intern knowledge about educational research and evaluation, acquisition of soft and technical skills, and confidence in completing tasks. The survey instrument is available in [Appendix A](#).

**PEER Group Member and Graduate Assistant Surveys.** Additionally, full-time PEER Group members and part-time PEER Group graduate assistants who worked with interns were also surveyed at the middle and end of the year. PEER Group member and graduate assistant surveys were used to measure the extent to which intern services were utilized, feedback about the interns' skills and quality of work, and general feedback and suggestions for the internship program. The survey instrument is available in [Appendix B](#).

## Interviews/Focus Groups

At the end of the program year, two types of virtual interviews/focus groups were conducted via Zoom: (1) PEER Intern Interviews and Focus Groups and (2) PEER Group Member and Graduate Assistant Focus Group. More information about each type of interview/focus group is provided below. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Data were qualitatively coded in Atlas.ti for emergent themes in intern growth and development as well as programmatic strengths and areas of improvement.

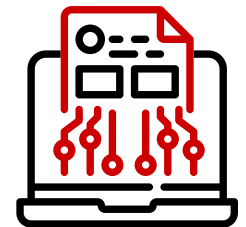


**PEER Intern Interviews and Focus Groups.** Interns completed individual exit interviews at the end of the year. The purpose of the exit interviews was to reflect on their professional development over the past year. In addition, interns also participated in a focus group interview to reflect on the program's strengths and areas for improvement. Both the exit interviews and the focus group were facilitated by a PEER graduate assistant to eliminate any power differences, which was a notable change from the pilot year where the intern supervisor facilitated these sessions. This change was made to encourage PEER interns to be more transparent about any personal shortcomings as well as program criticisms. The intern exit interview and focus group protocols are available in [Appendix C](#).

**PEER Group Member and Graduate Assistant Focus Group.** PEER Group members and graduate assistants who worked with interns were also invited to participate in a semi-structured focus group session led by the intern supervisor to learn more about program strengths and areas of improvement. The focus group protocol is available in [Appendix D](#).

## Artifacts

Throughout the program year, interns created five electronic artifacts to document their experiences. In addition, one electronic artifact was created by the Intern Supervisor to document monthly progress. Each artifact is explained in detail below.



**Individual and collective project logs** are preformatted Google spreadsheets where interns track all their work tasks. Information obtained from project logs included date, time in/time out, number of hours, a brief description of task/activity and any questions or concerns. Three out of four interns completed project logs for each task they were assigned during the yearlong internship experience. Edwards monitored project logs weekly and responded to questions as needed. Data were analyzed to determine themes in (1) the types of tasks interns completed, (2) the amount of time it took them to complete certain tasks, and (3) the types of questions interns asked/the type of support they needed to complete their tasks. Data were also analyzed to determine aggregate descriptive statistics concerning time spent on the internship.

**Electronic journals** are Google documents where interns reflect on their work tasks and professional development. Electronic journals did not have a set prompt; rather, interns were encouraged to use these free writing assignments to make meaning of their experience in real time. Three out of four interns completed weekly journal entries, and the internship supervisor also monitored electronic journals on a weekly basis to ascertain intern perceptions during the internship. Data were also coded for emergent themes in intern growth and development.

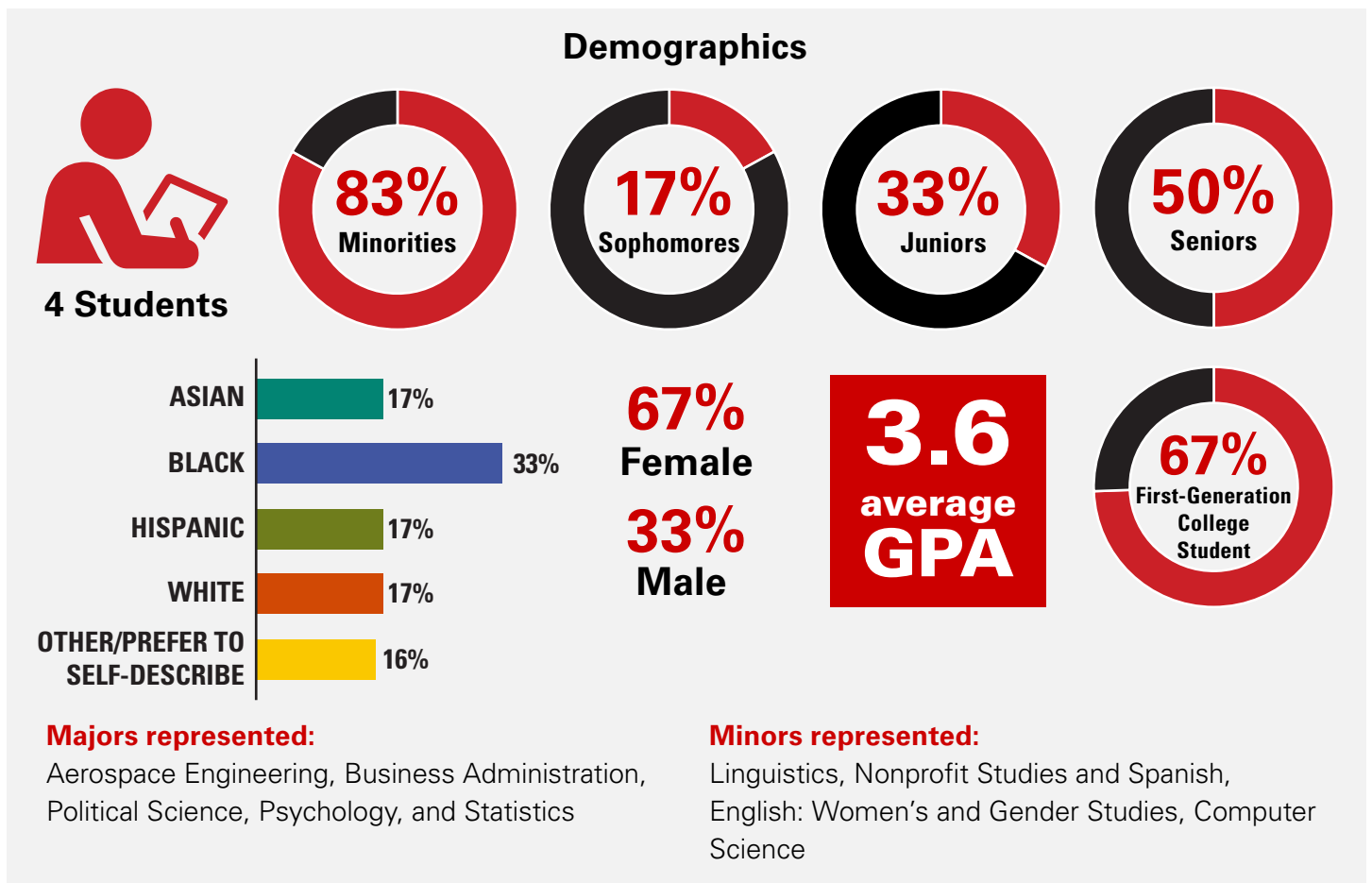
**Blog posts** are written reflective deliverables that describe intern experiences and what they learned. Three out of four interns authored a final blog post for inclusion on the PEER Group intern website. Data were coded for emergent themes in intern growth and development.

**Final presentations** are oral reflective deliverables that describe intern experiences and what they learned. Four interns delivered a final presentation via Zoom at a PEER Group meeting. All presentations were recorded and transcribed. One intern was unable to join the PEER Group meeting due to an unexpected schedule conflict. This intern recorded an asynchronous presentation via Zoom to share with the team, which was also transcribed. Data were coded for emergent themes in intern growth and development.

**Monthly memos** were created by the Internship Supervisor to conduct iterative evaluations and chronicle intern program updates. Each memo included a timeline of recent activities, implementation lessons learned for the month, dissemination status updates, notable changes, and next steps. At the end of the program year, these memos were used to triangulate evaluation findings.



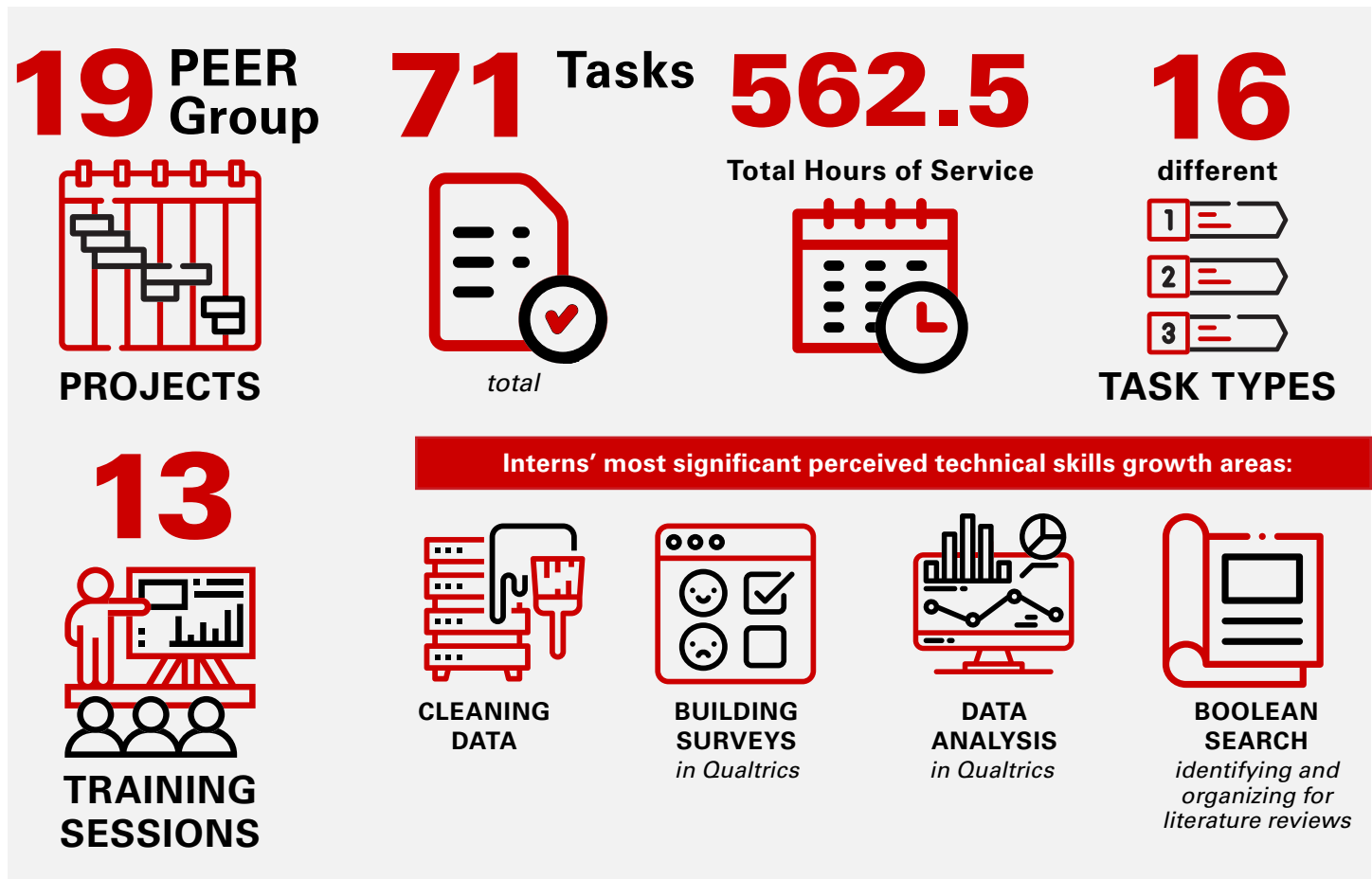
## Snapshot of Year 2 Cohort



Of note, four interns completed the full academic year experience. One intern graduated in fall 2021, and another intern joined in fall 2021 but shortly thereafter secured another opportunity on-campus and was unable to complete the internship.

## Impact At A Glance

Over the course of the year, interns' contributions were significant. For the yearlong experience, total hours worked ranged from 47 to 158 hours. The grand totals and most significant achievements are below:



## Evaluation Findings

**EQ1: How, and to what extent, did the PEER internship program expose interns to the environment and expectations of educational research and evaluation?**

### Key Findings



- ✓ Interns gained a deeper understanding of what constitutes educational research and evaluation.
- ✓ Real-world application was key to exposing PEER Interns to the environment and expectations of educational research and evaluation.
- ✓ All interns reported increased confidence in performing educational research and evaluation tasks.

**Interns gained a deeper understanding of what constitutes educational research and evaluation.** Prior to the internship, one intern believed research had to be related to STEM or conducted in a lab. Participating in the program helped interns expand their conceptualizations of what constitutes research. Participants recognize that educational research and evaluation is a process that requires reviewing relevant literature and using that literature to inform the educational project that is developed.

“ *When I came into the internship, I thought research was only STEM and in a laboratory. Then, I learned about all these different softwares like Tableau and Atlas.ti and Qualtrics, and getting hands-on experience with using them has definitely enhanced not only my understanding but my ability to conduct research on my own, but especially in classes as well.* ”

–PEER Intern

**Real-world application was key to exposing PEER Interns to the environment and expectations of educational research and evaluation.**

All interns gained a real world understanding of the role of educational researchers and evaluators and gained experience performing the duties and responsibilities for those roles. Interns experienced 16 different tasks associated with educational research and evaluation including: qualitative coding of interviews and focus groups, conducting Spanish translations (of consent forms and instruments from English to Spanish, checking translation of a flyer and instrument from English to Spanish), creating breakout reports (tables and charts from Qualtrics surveys), showing best practices of literature searching (literature searching for equitable evaluation, STEM identity), participating in CITI Trainings for IRB approval access, completing open-ended survey item simple response analysis, collecting/compiling email addresses for sending survey or adding contact information to a spreadsheet, data entry/cleaning/reviewing, transcript cleaning, testing surveys before launch and providing feedback, reviewing project IRBs, conducting interviews and focus groups, creating memos for assigned questions, completing tight reads and copy edits of reports, creating research posters, and writing participant narratives.

Building on the real-world application, interns were also able to recognize the importance and impact of the tasks they completed. For example, one participant worked on a project that analyzed data from parent surveys, which was subsequently presented at a Wake County School Board meeting. Participants discussed the need to use participant quotes and ensure that researchers accurately represent the perspectives and experiences of human subjects.

“ *So one major thing that I’ve learned throughout my two years is that educational research looks different for every single person that’s pursuing it. So really getting the opportunity to work with all different types of people who are working on different projects for different reasons for different companies has been really interesting to see that educational research is just such a multifaceted field. It’s just a lot of options with educators. I also learned a lot about how educational research impacts the community that we’re in. I’ve always wanted to pursue a career that would have an impact on the world, and this is definitely a career that falls under those lines.* ”

–PEER Intern



**All participants reported increased confidence in performing educational research and evaluation tasks.** Specifically, there was increased confidence in locating journals, research, and validated surveys; using Boolean searches; using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) (e.g., Atlas.ti, Tableau, Qualtrics); and copyediting documents and reports. Students reported feeling better prepared to complete research-related assignments for coursework and find relevant literature. Additionally, interns felt more confident in their ability to produce professional, formal, or academic writing and contribute to research reports. Program participants viewed the Friday Institute as a healthy workplace where they felt valued and supported in completing research and evaluation tasks.

“ *I would say it has entirely changed my view on my ability to do it [conduct educational research and evaluation]. Overall, I've gotten to work on so many different types of projects.*

–PEER Intern

“ *I really like that they get an opportunity to see something that's available to them in education, other than being a teacher. I feel like if I had gone somewhere, that I could have been exposed to other possibilities related to education, which I loved so much. But I only knew that I couldn't be a teacher. There was never any idea of oh, maybe there were other things I could do related to that. So maybe I could have taught for just a couple years and done something else entirely. But I think that's a really great opportunity for them, especially if they were thinking about education in any way to kind of see what goes into some of the other occupations that I would call education adjacent.*

–PEER Group

## EQ2: How, and to what extent, did the PEER internship program develop interns' transferable workforce skills?

### Key Findings



- ✓ All interns reported gains in valuable soft and technical skills, specifically the ability to locate relevant research and written communication.
- ✓ Most interns demonstrated initiative and professionalism while delivering quality products.

**All interns reported gains in valuable soft and technical skills, specifically the ability to locate relevant research and written communication.** The program's second objective was to improve interns' transferable workforce skills. This objective was met because all interns reported increases in their technical and soft skill sets. While these skills assisted interns in carrying out research and evaluation tasks, they are also valued by employers, so interns can use them in a number of professional environments beyond the internship.

Soft skills development included increased confidence, collaboration, organization, time management, inclusion, communication, and leadership. Technical skill development included use of the Boolean search method, using CAQDAS, cleaning data, using excel spreadsheets, written communication (e.g., formal emails, executive summaries), grammatical skills, and data analysis. Moreover, interns reported feeling better prepared to complete research-related assignments for undergraduate coursework and find relevant literature. Additionally, interns felt more confident in their ability to produce professional, formal, or academic writing and contribute to research reports.

“ For my written skills, I definitely saw an improvement. I feel like I improved significantly because I know business etiquette on how to write a standard email. Before, I didn’t have that experience, because usually it is you know, Group Me, it’s more text messages and shorthand, but now it’s like knowing I have to write like a formal email. Then also with the research project, at the end, I had to write an executive summary for my process of how and what I did, which was really nice, because I got to sit down and understand my whole process. It was really nice. Going back and reflecting on what I did, how I did it, and how I can, like, explain it to someone else who’s going to read it in the future and be like, Okay, this is what she did, which was really nice.

–PEER Intern

While all interns reported gains in valuable soft and technical skills, this was particularly true for the Lead Intern whose perspective “entirely changed” as a result of the internship. Participating in various projects over the course of two years led to a well-rounded understanding of educational evaluation and research, strong confidence in her ability to perform tasks, and commitment to producing quality work. The Lead Intern explained that the internship allowed her to “take myself more seriously as a leader and as a person in the field of research”.

**Most interns demonstrated initiative and professionalism while delivering quality products.** During the midyear PEER Group Inventory, PEER Group members celebrated the interns’ communication skills and high-quality deliverables. The workplace culture of the Friday Institute greatly contributed to participants’ experience and ability to grow/develop these skills. Participants frequently identified the inclusive environment and supportive members of the FI as key factors that contributed to their skill development and how they envision their future working conditions. The main intern challenge has been balancing work and school.



## EQ3: How, and to what extent, did the PEER internship program enhance PEER Group operations?

### Key Findings



- ✓ Redistributing introductory research tasks to interns allowed full-time researchers to prioritize intermediate and advanced tasks.
- ✓ As interns gain technical skills, they are able to take on more challenging research tasks and become more adept.
- ✓ Hiring interns is a cost-effective solution for preparing future educational researchers and evaluators from diverse backgrounds.

**Redistributing introductory research tasks to interns allowed full-time researchers to prioritize intermediate and advanced tasks.** At the end of fiscal year 2021-2022, the PEER Group had 24 funded contracts and grants totaling over \$4.5 million and several evaluation service agreements totaling over \$20,000. PEER interns enhanced PEER Group operations by completing a total of 71 tasks across 19 PEER group projects. PEER Group members reported that interns have been beneficial for saving time with routine tasks such as transcript and data cleaning, reviewing and summarizing documents and reports, compiling contact information, and creating data tables.

“ It saves me so much time when I am able to pass off some of my smaller tasks and focus my energy on the more difficult ones.”

–PEER Group

“ You know, we’ve had them do things like gather contact information into one document or make tables, out of data, just things that can save us time. And let us spend more time in analysis rather than data cleaning, not necessarily things that we need to run analysis on. But just things that if they’re cleaned up and a whole lot faster for us to look at.”

–PEER Group

**As interns gain technical skills, they are able to take on more challenging research tasks and become more adept.** While this phenomena was pervasive among all interns, it was especially pronounced for the Lead Intern who emphasized how two years in the program contributed significantly to her ability to take on new and challenging tasks. She explained, the experience “enhanced not only my understanding, but my ability to conduct research just like on my own, especially in classes as well. Overall, I’ve gotten to work on so many different types of projects, because I’ve been here a little bit longer, and I feel like I just have a well rounded understanding of what they do at the FI.” Additionally, the Lead Intern discussed her experience of working with a graduate research assistant and feeling like she could meaningfully contribute to a summary report in collaboration with the graduate student.

“ I mean, like, [the lead intern] in particular, I thought she was a grad student. I didn’t know she was an undergrad. So she did this one project for me. And I was saying something and she said, Oh, no, I’m a junior. My jaw was on the floor. I was like, okay, she’s going places.

–PEER Group

**Hiring interns is a cost-effective solution for preparing future educational researchers and evaluators from diverse backgrounds.**

The Federal Work-Study (FWS) program and the Friday Institute continued its collaboration to support the internship program, which required all interns to be work-study eligible. The deliberate focus on giving opportunities to students with financial need is one example of how this program is strategically connected with the Friday Institute’s impact area of “cultivating equality in education through equity-mindedness”. Through this partnership, interns earned a maximum of \$12 per hour on a biweekly payroll schedule. The FWS contributed 75% of students’ earnings, and the FI covered the remaining 25%. Over the course of the 2021-2022 school year, interns worked a total of 562.50 hours and earned a total of \$6,750.

“ I learned a lot about how important it is to get the little tasks done. Like copy editing, and, like, just having a second eye on things or, like, looking over arguments that feature the Friday Institute and making sure that corresponds with actually what the Friday Institute has said. Those are things that are really important that I feel like can slip in the cracks. And it might not be like the focus of the whole internship or like a bigger project, but those are things that I worked on. And I really liked that because it just showed how important smaller things were. But then also how they were trusting me with things like these documents that not a lot of people are able to see. So that was nice to have that trust level as well from so many people at various levels within the Friday Institute.

–PEER Intern

**Year 2 Cost Comparison for FI PEER Interns, Graduate Research Assistants, and Fulltime Researchers**

	PEER Intern (\$12/hour FI pays 25%)	Graduate Research Assistant (\$30/hour)	Full time Researcher (\$65000/31.25/hour)
Salary	\$468	\$7,020	\$12,438
Benefits		\$593	\$3,898
Health Insurance			\$1,343
Associated F&A		\$1,142	\$2,450
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$468</b>	<b>\$8,755</b>	<b>\$20,129</b>

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The evaluation findings underscore three cross-cutting themes, namely:

### Themes

- The Lead Intern role proved to be mutually beneficial for student development and organizational operations
- Communication and flexibility remain essential to intern programming
- Accountability emerged as a key need for continued program growth and success

This section discusses recommendations drawn from evaluation findings. These recommendations present the opportunity to help the program achieve its goals and to address issues that came to light during the second year. Recommendations provided by PEER interns and PEER Group members fell into three categories including **intern accountability**, **program structure**, and **participant recruitment**.

**Recommendation: Incorporate accountability measures for PEER Interns.** Year 2 revealed that intern capacity, self-efficacy, and stress levels must be consistently monitored and assessed. Moreover, interns must be empowered to share the limits of their capacity. One intern in particular became unresponsive and did not complete assigned tasks. This highlighted a need to brainstorm stop-out measures, or protocols when an intern might need to exit their position. Interns and group members alike suggest that all interns be held accountable and have processes to communicate when they need to step back from a project or the internship itself.

**Recommendation: Create a streamlined task-assignment process that incorporates a weekly meeting structure.** Due to conflicting PEER intern schedules, PEER meetings occurred on a biweekly rotating basis; however, all interns expressed a desire for more frequent communication and opportunities to connect in person. Weekly meetings could help improve communication and connections between interns. Moreover, interns would like to receive their tasks from a designated person, rather than Slack (e.g., during Year 1, tasks were filtered through the program coordinator). Unlike graduate research assistants, undergraduate interns find it more difficult to self-select tasks. Another suggestion included assigning a major project to interns at the beginning of the program, which could help the interns plan for their final presentations. Finally, interns need clearly established due dates or deadlines for completing tasks.

“ So generally, for improving the internship, I think continuing to move the internship to more in person, I think would create more culture, better collaboration and better community with the interns.

–PEER Intern

**Recommendation: Provide partnership and mentorship opportunities.** An overall goal for Year 3 of the program is to include more voices and expertise from the PEER Group and Friday Institute more broadly to enhance the program design and implementation. To that end, pairing undergraduate and graduate students provided a mutually beneficial learning experience. This model of pairing undergraduate and



graduate students and providing structured support from a mentor/supervisor may be advantageous for future long-term projects and help expose interns to the culture of collaboration within educational evaluation and research. Moreover, interns expressed a desire for more collaboration among interns. The mostly virtual nature of the program and lack of weekly meetings led to feelings of disconnection and sometimes “it didn’t feel as personable.” Collaboration among interns would provide incentive for the interns to communicate with and get to know each other.

Additional structural elements that could improve the effectiveness and impact of the internship include easily accessible information regarding interns’ availability, abilities, strengths, and preferred tasks that could be distributed to PEER group members. Suggestions for streamlining intern task assignments included adding a five-minute item to PEER Group meetings regarding share outs and updates on intern progress or a “Big Buddy” component that assigns interns to a specific PEER Group member, who would then serve as a mentor.

**Recommendation: Strengthen recruitment efforts and clarify intern expectations during the recruitment process.** The program seeks to ensure that all interns have an understanding of the responsibilities of the internship and have a desire to engage in the experience. Ensuring interns are a good fit for the program may help with accountability measures. To that end, one notable change in year 3 is that August will be used to recruit and interview incoming interns, and the internship will officially begin in September. As in prior years, the program will collaborate with university partners such as TRIO and the Office of Undergraduate Research to disseminate the call for applications. The Lead Intern will also be involved in recruitment and interviewing process, which is also new for the upcoming year. As a current undergraduate who is eligible for the program, the Lead Intern has key knowledge on how to best reach the target population via recruitment. By engaging the Lead Intern in the interview process, prospective interns will be able to hear first-hand the day-to-day experiences of an intern and confirm if they desire to participate. The program will also host an in-person intern orientation in September to aid in community-building and better manage expectation setting. Both orientations in Year 1 and Year 2 were virtual.

## References

DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., & Schutz, P. A. (2016). *Developing a mixed methods proposal: A practical guide for beginning researchers* (Vol. 5). Sage Publications.

# Appendix A: PEER Intern Survey Matrix

## Intern Pre-Inventory Survey Questions

1. What year are you in college?
2. During which academic year are you participating in the PEER Internship program?
3. What year do you plan to graduate college?
4. How do you describe your ethnicity?
5. What is your gender?
6. What is your major? (if you are a double major, please name both your majors)
7. What is your minor? (if none, put N/A)
8. What is your cumulative GPA? (on a 4.0 scale)
9. Are you a first-generation college student?
10. What is your future career goal?
11. How did you find out about this internship?
12. Why did you apply to this internship?
13. What, if anything, are you looking forward to in this internship? (if nothing put N/A).
14. What, if anything, are you concerned about with this internship? (if nothing put N/A).
15. At this moment in time, how long do you plan to continue this internship?
16. Please share what you know currently about the roles and responsibilities of educational research and evaluation (if nothing put N/A).
17. How many research and evaluation projects have you worked on before this internship? (Please write a number, if none, please type 0)

**18.** For each statement, please decide how much you agree or disagree with the statement and select the option that best matches how you feel.

- I have a strong research and evaluation background.
- I feel confident in my research and evaluation skills.
- I am familiar with qualitative research methods.
- I feel confident in my qualitative research skills.
- I am familiar with quantitative research methods.
- I feel confident in my quantitative research skills.
- I understand the responsibility of an educational researcher and evaluator.
- I am aware of tools that can support my research and evaluation skills.
- I am aware of careers in educational research and evaluation.

**19.** For each statement, please decide how much you agree or disagree with the statement and select the option that best matches how you feel.

- I am a strong leader.
- I feel confident in my leadership skills.
- I have had many opportunities to develop my leadership skills.
- I am aware of tools that can support my leadership skills.



**20.** Below you will see a list of skills. Please rate how skilled you are in these areas in this moment in time. The scale is from 1 (low) to 10 (high)

- Research and Evaluation
- Leadership
- Written Communication
- Verbal Communication
- Teamwork
- Organization
- Attention to Detail
- Data Analysis

**21.** Below you will see a list of tasks. Please rate how skilled you are in these areas in this moment in time. The scale is from 1 (low) to 10 (high)

- Identifying and organizing relevant articles for literature reviews
- Cleaning data
- Performing data entry
- Building surveys in Qualtrics
- Creating tables and charts
- Supporting qualitative data collection
- Supporting quantitative data collection
- Coordinating site visit logistics
- Coordinating focus groups
- Formatting and copy editing memos, reports, and presentations
- Updating websites

**22.** What type of professional development or training would be most beneficial to you? If you are unsure, put "not sure". If none, put N/A.

### **Intern Mid-Inventory Survey Questions**

- 1.** During which academic year are you participating in the PEER Internship program?
- 2.** How many research and evaluation projects have you worked on since starting this internship? (Please write a number, if none, please type 0)
- 3.** Please share what you know currently about the roles and responsibilities of educational research and evaluation (if nothing put N/A).

**4.** For each statement, please decide how much you agree or disagree with the statement and select the option that best matches how you feel.

- I have a strong research and evaluation background.
- I feel confident in my research and evaluation skills.
- I am familiar with qualitative research methods.
- I feel confident in my qualitative research skills.
- I am familiar with quantitative research methods.
- I feel confident in my quantitative research skills.
- I understand the responsibility of an educational researcher and evaluator.
- I am aware of tools that can support my research and evaluation skills.
- I am aware of careers in educational research and evaluation.

**5.** For each statement, please decide how much you agree or disagree with the statement and select the option that best matches how you feel.

- I am a strong leader.
- I feel confident in my leadership skills.
- I have had many opportunities to develop my leadership skills.
- I am aware of tools that can support my leadership skills.

**6.** Below you will see a list of skills. Please rate how skilled you are in these areas in this moment in time. The scale is from 1 (low) to 10 (high)

- Research and Evaluation
- Leadership
- Written Communication
- Verbal Communication
- Teamwork
- Organization
- Attention to Detail
- Data Analysis

**7.** Below you will see a list of tasks. Please rate how skilled you are in these areas in this moment in time. The scale is from 1 (low) to 10 (high)

- Identifying and organizing relevant articles for literature reviews
- Cleaning data
- Performing data entry
- Building surveys in Qualtrics
- Creating tables and charts
- Supporting qualitative data collection
- Supporting quantitative data collection
- Coordinating site visit logistics
- Coordinating focus groups
- Formatting and copy editing memos, reports, and presentations
- Updating websites

**8.** Please rate the usefulness of the following professional development sessions.

- Week 1: Orientation
- Week 2: Evaluation Foundations: Evaluation 101 and Educational Equity
- Week 3: Evaluation Foundations: Logic Models 101
- Week 4: Research Communications
- Week 5: Research Tools Available at NCSU Libraries
- Week 6: Inclusive Leadership
- Week 7: Semester Wrap Up
- Please share any feedback about the professional development sessions we have had so far.
- What type of professional development or training would be most beneficial to you?

**9.** What has been the best part of the internship so far?

**10.** What has been the most challenging part of the internship so far?

**11.** What have you learned from the internship so far? (if nothing, put N/A)

**12.** What, if anything, are you still looking forward to in this internship? (if nothing, put N/A)

**13.** What, if anything, are you concerned about with this internship? (if nothing, put N/A).

**14.** What suggestions do you have to improve the internship?

**15.** If you have any remaining feedback to share about your experience in the internship program so far, please feel free to share it in the box below.

## Intern Post-Inventory Survey Questions

1. During which academic year are you participating in the PEER Internship program?
2. How many internships have you had before starting this internship? (Please write a number, if none, please type 0)
3. How many research and evaluation projects have you worked on since starting this internship? (Please write a number, if none, please type 0)
4. Please share what you know currently about the roles and responsibilities of educational research and evaluation (if nothing put N/A).

5. For each statement, please decide how much you agree or disagree with the statement and select the option that best matches how you feel.

- I have a strong research and evaluation background.
- I feel confident in my research and evaluation skills.
- I am familiar with qualitative research methods.
- I feel confident in my qualitative research skills.
- I am familiar with quantitative research methods.
- I feel confident in my quantitative research skills.
- I understand the responsibility of an educational researcher and evaluator.
- I am aware of tools that can support my research and evaluation skills.
- I am aware of careers in educational research and evaluation.

6. For each statement, please decide how much you agree or disagree with the statement and select the option that best matches how you feel.

- I am a strong leader.
- I feel confident in my leadership skills.
- I have had many opportunities to develop my leadership skills.
- I am aware of tools that can support my leadership skills.

7. Below you will see a list of skills. Please rate how skilled you are in these areas in this moment in time. The scale is from 1 (low) to 10 (high)

- |                           |                       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Research and Evaluation | • Teamwork            |
| • Leadership              | • Organization        |
| • Written Communication   | • Attention to Detail |
| • Verbal Communication    | • Data Analysis       |

**8.** Below you will see a list of tasks. Please rate how skilled you are in these areas in this moment in time. The scale is from 1 (low) to 10 (high)

- Identifying and organizing relevant articles for literature reviews
- Cleaning data
- Performing data entry
- Building surveys in Qualtrics
- Creating tables and charts
- Supporting qualitative data collection
- Supporting quantitative data collection
- Coordinating site visit logistics
- Coordinating focus groups
- Formatting and copy editing memos, reports, and presentations
- Updating websites

**9.** Please use this space to provide any additional information about the skills you used or learned during this internship. (If none, put "n/a")

**10.** Please rate the usefulness of the following professional development sessions from spring 2022.

- Week 1: PEER Intern Lunch/Retreat
- Week 2: A Case Study of Teachers' Use of an Online Homework Tool During In-Person and Remote Learning and Research Poster Prep
- Week 3: Research Poster Prep Part 2
- Week 4: From First Generation Student to Director of IT
- Week 5: Using and Transforming Math Education Pedagogy in a Broadcast Setting
- Week 6: Graduate Research Assistant Student Panel
- Week 7: The Opportunity to Dream: How an Early Learning Network Implemented the Liberatory Design Process
- Week 8: End of Semester Celebration and Final Presentation
- Please share any feedback about the professional development sessions we've had as a part of this internship.
- What type of future professional development or training would be most beneficial to you? If you are unsure put "not sure". If none, put N/A.

**11.** If you could describe this internship in one word what would it be and why?

**12.** Please share one memory from the internship program that stands out to you. Why is this memory meaningful to you?

**13. PLEASE SHARE ANY PLUS (+) FEEDBACK:**

- What has been the best part of the internship to you?
- What, if anything, have you learned or gained from the internship?
- What was one thing you learned that you will use/take with you to other internships/jobs?

**14. PLEASE SHARE ANY DELTA (  $\Delta$  ) FEEDBACK:**

- What has been the most challenging part of the internship to you?
- What recommendations do you have for improving the internship for future years?

**15.** How, if at all, have your future plans/career goals changed or become more clear as a result of this internship? If your future plans/career goals have not been impacted put "n/a".

**16.** What characteristics are important for an intern to be successful in this program? (These can be characteristics of the intern themselves or of the program)

**17.** Would you recommend the internship to others?

**18.** If you have any remaining feedback to share about your experience in the internship program, please feel free to share it in the box below.

# Appendix B: PEER Group Member and Graduate Assistant Survey Matrix

## Mid-Year PEER Group Member and Graduate Assistant Survey Questions

1. Please describe your role on the PEER Group.
2. How many interns have you worked with this semester? (Please write a number, if none, please type 0)
3. How many of your research and evaluation projects have the interns worked on this semester? (Please write a number, if none, please type 0)
4. We want to know how the internship program aligns with your expectations. The internship program:

5. Below you will see a list of statements, for each statement, please decide how much you agree or disagree with the statement and select the option that best matches how you feel.

- I am comfortable working with the interns
- The interns produce high quality deliverables
- The interns complete assigned tasks within a reasonable time frame
- The interns increase the PEER Group's efficiency
- The interns increase the PEER Group's sustainability
- The internship program is relevant to my needs
- If you have any feedback to share about how the internship program affects the PEER Group's efficiency or sustainability, please share it here.

6. Below you will see a list of tasks. Please rate how satisfied you have been overall with the interns' work in these areas. The scale is from 1 (low) to 10 (high). If you have not observed the interns' work in this area please select N/A.

- Identifying and organizing relevant articles for literature reviews
- Cleaning data
- Performing data entry
- Building surveys in Qualtrics
- Creating tables and charts
- Supporting qualitative data collection
- Supporting quantitative data collection
- Coordinating site visit logistics
- Coordinating focus groups
- Formatting and copy editing memos, reports, and presentations
- Updating websites Please share any feedback about the interns' skills and quality of work so far. You can provide feedback holistically or highlight specific interns you have worked with.

7. What type of future professional development or training would be most beneficial to the interns either for spring 2022, or for a future cohort to have in the fall semester? If you are unsure put "not sure". If none, put N/A.
8. What have been the strengths of the internship program so far?
9. What have been the areas of improvement for the internship program so far?
10. What changes would you like to see made to the internship program moving forward?
11. If you have any remaining feedback to share about your experience with the internship program so far, please feel free to share it in the box below.

**Post-Year PEER Group Member and Graduate Assistant Survey Questions**

1. How many interns have you worked with this semester? (Please write a number, if none, please type 0)
2. What academic year are you evaluating in the PEER Internship program?
3. How many of your research and evaluation projects have the interns worked on this semester? (Please write a number, if none, please type 0)
4. We want to know how the internship program aligns with your expectations. The internship program:

5. Below you will see a list of statements, for each statement, please decide how much you agree or disagree with the statement and select the option that best matches how you feel.

- I am comfortable working with the interns
- The interns produce high quality deliverables
- The interns complete assigned tasks within a reasonable time frame
- The interns increase the PEER Group’s efficiency
- The interns increase the PEER Group’s sustainability
- The internship program is relevant to my needs
- If you have any feedback to share about how the internship program affects the PEER Group’s efficiency or sustainability, please share it here.

6. Below you will see a list of tasks. Please rate how satisfied you have been overall with the interns’ work in these areas. The scale is from 1 (low) to 10 (high). If you have not observed the interns’ work in this area please select N/A.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • Identifying and organizing relevant articles for literature reviews | • Supporting quantitative data collection                       |
| • Cleaning data   | • Coordinating site visit logistics                             |
| • Performing data entry   | • Coordinating focus groups                                     |
| • Building surveys in Qualtrics                                       | • Formatting and copy editing memos, reports, and presentations |
| • Creating tables and charts  | • Updating websites   |
| • Supporting qualitative data collection                              |   |



7. Please share any feedback about the interns' skills and quality of work. You can provide feedback holistically or highlight specific interns you have worked with.
8. What type of future professional development or training would be most beneficial to the interns? If you are unsure put "not sure". If none, put N/A.
9. If you could describe this internship program in one word what would it be and why?

**10.** Please Share any Plus (+) Feedback:

- What have been the strengths of the internship program this year?
- What, if anything, have you learned or gained from the internship program?
- What, if anything, are you looking forward to with this internship program in future years?

**11.** Please Share Any Delta ( $\Delta$ ) Feedback:

- What have been the areas of improvement for the internship program this year?
- What changes would you like to see made to the internship program moving forward?
- What recommendations do you have for expanding the internship program?
- What, if anything, are you concerned about with this internship program?

12. If you have any remaining feedback to share about your experience with the internship program, please feel free to share it in the box below.

# Appendix C: Intern Exit Interview and Focus Group Protocol Matrix

## Intern Exit Interview Protocol

### **Background**

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself
2. Why did you apply to the Program Evaluation and Education Research (PEER) Internship program?

### **Goals**

3. One goal of the internship is to expose interns to the environment and expectations of educational research and evaluation. What did you learn about the roles and responsibilities of educational research and evaluation?
4. To what extent did the internship increase your confidence in performing educational research and evaluation tasks?
5. Another goal of the internship is to develop interns' transferable workforce skills. To what extent did the internship develop your soft skills? (examples: organization, leadership, teamwork, and attention to detail.)
6. To what extent did the internship develop your technical skills? (examples written and verbal communication and data analysis)

### **Benefits**

7. What was the most valuable part of this program for you professionally and personally?
8. What was one thing you learned that you will use/take with you to other internships/jobs?

### **Improvement**

9. How can the internship program be improved?

### **Last Words**

10. What would you say to other students thinking about applying for the program?
11. Is there anything you would like to share that we haven't already discussed?

## Intern Focus Group Protocol

### **Focus Group Interview Goals**

1. To gain an understanding of program participant experiences, what they learned, and their recommendations for program improvement

### **Program Communication**

2. How did you find out about the PEER Internship Program?

### **Participant Goals**

3. What did you hope to gain from participating in the program?
  - a. Were you able to gain those things? Is there anything you hoped to gain but didn't?

### ***What Participants Learned***

4. What did you learn or take away from the PEER Internship Program? What skills were you able to develop the most?
  - a. What did you learn or realize about (the environment and expectations of?) educational research and program evaluation?

### ***Participant Experiences***

5. What were your most valuable learning experiences or opportunities in the program?
6. How would you describe the program to a friend? Would you recommend it?
  - a. Would you apply for this program again? Why or why not?

### ***Program Improvement***

7. What do you wish you could have experienced more of or learned more about?
8. What could be done to improve the PEER Internship Program?
  - a. What additional experiences, opportunities, or learning could you benefit from?

### ***Additional Information***

9. Is there anything that you would like to share that I didn't ask you about?

# Appendix D: PEER Group Member and Graduate Assistant Focus Group Protocol

## Goals

1. The goals of the internship are to: (1) expose interns to the environment and expectations of educational research and evaluation, (2) develop interns' transferable workforce skills, and (3) enhance PEER Group operations.

We know a lot about the first two goals from the intern surveys and interviews, so I'd like to focus our conversation on goal three. However, before we jump to goal three, do you have feedback you would like to share about goals one and two?

2. When I say "enhance PEER Group operations" what I mean specifically is increasing group efficiency (i.e., completing tasks quicker and/or at a less expensive rate) and increase group sustainability (i.e., creating processes and procedures that endure despite personnel changes). Keeping those definitions in mind, to what extent did the intern program contribute to group efficiency or sustainability from your perspective?

## Benefits

3. What was the most valuable part of this program for the PEER Group?
4. What was one thing you learned while working with the interns?

## Improvement

5. How can the internship program be improved?

## Last Words

6. Is there anything you would like to share that we haven't already discussed?

## Appendix E: Additional Illustrative Quotes

### Understanding Educational Research & Evaluation

- My first task that I worked on was helping a team member compile data from a survey that was handed out to parents at Wake County Schools. And it was whether or not they felt comfortable with their kids going back to in person school because of COVID. And then the next day after I was finished with collecting the data and compiling and cleaning the data, it was presented at the Wake County School Board meeting. And so that was really cool for me to see instantly like right when I got put into the internship that's what I was doing, no matter how big or small was making an impact. (PEER Intern)
- I learned a lot, particularly, you're researching people, and you're like, having direct quotes. I know, like, that's something super important. And also, making sure that you're not speaking for a specific group, as well, um, you're not making a generalization. (PEER Intern)

### Soft & Technical Skill Development

- In my first year as an intern, I had to work on more minor projects with cleaning data. And I had to work in a spreadsheet and use the different equations that go into the spreadsheet. And I've never done that before. So getting to learn and get a hands-on in depth understanding of this is what the spreadsheet does. And like, this is going to help you clean your data so much faster than whether you just sat counting every little thing. That was like my first example of being able to learn more about technical skills. (PEER Intern)
- I think for soft skills, I really did develop my organizational skills because I had this internship, plus another internship and classes. So definitely balancing everything out. Last semester, I definitely learned a lot because it was really hard coordinating at first, but then I talked to Callie and she mentioned you have to set your own schedule and she gave us tips. So I definitely got that out of it. Also, teamwork. I think collaboration really was beneficial this semester. Last year. We really didn't see that as much but this semester, I really enjoyed doing the research project with my fellow PEER members, which was really nice, because we really didn't have any collaborations last semester, but this semester, we got to see and get to know one another, which was, I know that I'll be able to use that in future for the workforce. (PEER Intern)
- Like I mentioned, Boolean search really did help out a lot. It's a wonderful tool that I feel like I didn't know about before so now, I definitely use it a lot more, especially now, for classes. I can just use specific terms and really narrow it down, which is super beneficial for my language classes because before I would have like 10,000 results. (PEER Intern)
- I used [the interns] mostly for transcript cleaning, which was an enormous help, I still had to go back through for some of them, not all of them and do some more like minor edits to the transcript, just format them how I like to have them formatted. But it was a huge help to cut down time for me by just cleaning up the Zoom transcripts. And then also other tasks that are I don't want to say they're not they're not menial tasks, but other tasks that would take me if I had to review a lot of documents at once and take notes on them or summarize them, I would have interns help me with that as well. And they were very helpful and cut down a lot of the time that I spent on these things. Less brain heavy, is the term I'm thinking of not menial. (PEER Group)



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