

## Human Services Remote Internships: What We Have Learned and Where We Are Headed

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### Abstract

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted human services education programs to rapidly rethink the structure of their fieldwork offerings. Mandated social restrictions led to the creation of alternative options to in-person internships. Some of these options included assignment-based tasks, online workshops and trainings, work-based experiences, limited in-person contact at fieldwork sites, and remote internships. For many programs, remote internships were a novel idea that needed to be quickly developed and implemented. The rise of telehealth services and the unknowns of a post-COVID world leave open the possibility of an increase in remote human services internships for the future. This qualitative study takes a first look at what the field of human services has learned about remote internships, including strengths, challenges, and recommendations, and discusses the role that remote internships might play in the future of human services education.

*Keywords:* COVID-19, human services education, remote internships

### Introduction

Despite varying definitions, remote internships, which are also referred to as *virtual internships* or *online internships*, take place primarily in an online setting. Hora et al. (2021) describes this form of internship as follows:

An online internship is an experiential, work-based learning program conducted primarily via digital or online technologies, with important variations within the modality with respect to program format and compliance with experiential learning standards. Despite the important differences inherent in an online internship, the same quality and accessibility standards and considerations should apply to all internships regardless of their modality. (p. 6)

Remote internships have been used frequently in fields such as information technology and business but are less common in fields such as healthcare and human services (Massingill, 2013; Ruggiero & Boehm, 2016; Szabo et al., 2018). Although remote internships might not have been commonplace before the COVID-19 pandemic, it is predicted that telehealth services are here to stay (Levy et al., 2021; Moreland et al., 2021; Sorinmade et al., 2020).

Some benefits that have been associated with remote internships have been new skill acquisition, flexibility, improved communication skills, and increased diversity among internship applicants for the agency (Briant & Crowther, 2020; Feldman, 2021; Jeske, 2014; Szu-Yu Chen & Speciale, 2020). As with all internships, the experience should be beneficial to both the student and the organization (Massingill, 2013). Significant advantages of remote internships for students include the lessening or elimination of commuting and workplace attire expenses and the increased flexibility to work from any location (Briant & Crowther, 2020; Massingill, 2013). Providing students, especially those with challenging life circumstances, the option of a remote internship is also an equitable approach to the fieldwork process (Briant & Crowther, 2020). For the organization, remote internships provide staff and administrators the opportunity to expand their search for interns outside of their geographical region and leads to savings in workplace expenses (Massingill, 2013). However, there are also challenges that might accompany remote internships.



One identified challenge of remote internships is that for the experience to be successful, the student must have a high level of autonomy and the ability to work without direct supervision (Massingill, 2013). Additional challenges could be that the intern feels isolated, lacks self-motivation, has difficulty developing boundaries between home-life and work-life, and/or lacks a sense of belonging at the internship organization (Bowen, 2020).

Another challenge for certain remote interns in helping professions, such as human services or social work, is that agencies might not offer or offer limited telehealth services for clients, especially during the current pandemic (Mitchell et al., 2021). An intern might not receive the opportunity for sufficient direct client contact hours and lack the chance to practice their counseling and interpersonal skills. Despite these challenges, it can be anticipated by human services education programs that students will need to be adequately prepared to meet clients' needs through both in-person and telehealth services.

### **Remote Human Services Internships**

The internship component of human services education programs is essential in preparing the next generation of professionals (Diambra, 2004). Many human services programs align their fieldwork requirements with the standards set forth by the Council for Standards in Human Services Education (CSHSE). These standards require students to complete a minimum of 250 hours of internship at the associate level, an additional 100 hours at the bachelor's level, and another 100 hours at the master's level (CSHSE, 2021). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing requirements, the accrediting body released the following message on their website about the fieldwork hours requirement:

Meeting the requirement for the number of hours required in field placements as well as the quality of the learning experience continue to be issues as programs plan for the fall semester. Institutional policies, state and local laws have precedence over CSHSE standards. As with the spring semester, programs should follow the institutions' directives as to class, fieldwork, internship, practicum, or clinical hours. Programs should make every effort to comply with the CSHSE Standards as much as possible and should consider alternate ways of having students complete their field hours in this type of environment (e.g., video conferencing with client simulated interactions, special case studies or other assignments that will reflect the student learning outcomes described in their field placement agreements). Any type of alternative plan should be thoroughly documented in preparation for the next accreditation cycle. (CSHSE, 2022)

In many cases students were left without the option of completing in-person internships; therefore, human services education programs turned to alternatives such as assignment-based tasks, workshops and trainings, work-based experiences, limited in-person contact at fieldwork sites, and remote internships. Although remote internships in human services were a novel idea for many institutions, they are likely to continue post-COVID. Currently, there is a lack of research focused on remote internships, especially in the human services field. Hora et al. (2021) wrote,

There is little research on online internships, and it is no exaggeration to state that the field of higher education is engaging in a massive experiment in which students are completing online internships with limited evidence to support their usefulness for students or their effectiveness in contributing to positive educational or career outcomes for college graduates. (p. 3)

Our study begins this work by identifying multiple current perspectives on remote human services internships and discussing the role that these types of internships might play in the future of human services education. These exploratory findings will provide human services



education programs with new insights that can inform further discussion of the potential of remote internships for their students both now and in the future. These findings will also guide further research in this area to identify best practices in preparing the next generation of human services professionals.

## Method

### Research Design

This qualitative study on remote internships was designed to answer the following research questions: What is known about human services remote internships? and What is the role of remote internships in the field of human services, both now and in the future? To best answer these questions, an online qualitative survey was used (Braun et al., 2021; Fink, 2003; Jansen, 2010). Qualitative surveys are used to investigate the “diversity of some type of interest with a given population” (Jansen, 2010, p. 3). This data collection method allows for participants to share their own perspectives and experiences.

### Participants

Through voluntary response sampling, representatives of the human services field including human services students, human services faculty, fieldwork coordinators, and human services practitioners from across the United States completed the study questionnaire. The sole criteria for participation was having experience with remote human services internships. Participants in this study ( $N = 41$ ) provided various perspectives on remote human services internships. Responses came from undergraduate 17% ( $n = 7$ ) and graduate 7% ( $n = 3$ ) human services students; undergraduate 27% ( $n = 11$ ) and graduate 15% ( $n = 6$ ) faculty; fieldwork coordinators 22% ( $n = 9$ ); and practitioners 10% ( $n = 4$ ). Participants identified as female 71% ( $n = 29$ ); male 27% ( $n = 11$ ); and prefer not to disclose 2% ( $n = 1$ ). Participants also identified as White 66% ( $n = 27$ ); Black 22% ( $n = 9$ ); Asian <1% ( $n = 1$ ); Hispanic or Latino <1% ( $n = 2$ ); Multiracial <1% ( $n = 1$ ); and prefer not to disclose <1% ( $n = 1$ ). Fewer than half (46%) of participants ( $n = 19$ ) had less than 1 year experience with remote human services internships; 39% ( $n = 16$ ) had 1–3 years; and a few had 3–5 years ( $n = 3$ ) or more than 5 years ( $n = 3$ ) of experience with remote internships.

### Questionnaire

We created an online questionnaire using Google Forms to collect various perspectives on human services remote internships. The questionnaire was piloted with three individuals in academic positions who were not associated with the study. The results of the pilot indicated the need for minor modifications in wording and increased clarification on three questions. The final questionnaire consisted of 12 short open-ended prompts (Figure 1). The items inquired into participants’ perspectives of remote internships based on their role and experiences. While responses were anonymous, participants had the opportunity to enter their email addresses for chance to win one of three \$20 Amazon gift cards. Email addresses were not associated with individual responses, and all responses were kept in a password protected file on a secure computer.



**Figure 1***Remote Human Services Internship Questionnaire*

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1. What role did/do you have with remote internships?
  2. How long have you had experience with remote human services internships?
  3. Please describe your experience with remote internships.
  4. Based on your experience, what are the strengths of remote human services internships?
  5. Based on your experience, what are the challenges of remote human services internships?
  6. Have you developed or improved any skill(s) as a result of your experience with remote internships?
  7. What recommendations do you have for faculty to better support remote internships in the classroom?
  8. What role, if any, do you think remote human services internships will play in a post-COVID world?
  9. If you are part of a human services education program, do you plan on offering remote internships as an option for students in the future?
  10. Do you have any additional thoughts about remote internships that you would like to share?
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**Procedure**

After Institutional Review Board approval for this study was granted, we contacted the executive board of the National Organization of Human Services (NOHS) to request that the study information be distributed to its members. The request was granted, and the study information was shared via email to all current members of NOHS. The study information was also posted on the NOHS website on their “Research Projects and Studies” section. In this voluntary response sampling approach, participants volunteered to be part of the sample. After NOHS distributed the email notification about the study, the questionnaire was left open for 3 weeks. The drawing for the three gift cards took place after the study was closed. The winners were randomly selected by an individual not associated with the study and notified via email.

Questionnaire responses were collected and organized by the participant’s role (e.g., graduate student, undergraduate faculty member, field coordinator). Following a multi-step thematic analysis framework (Nowell et al., 2017), the primary researcher identified four main domains based on the category of the question: *strengths*, *challenges*, *recommendations for improvement*, and *the future of remote internships*. Responses under each of these domains were reviewed, and preliminary notes and reflections were made. These preliminary codes were then reviewed, color-coded, and further analyzed. An initial coding framework was developed.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness and credibility were obtained through various tactics such as the use of exact quotations shared in the findings, secondary member checks through peer-debriefing, and data triangulation (Patton, 2002; Shenton, 2004). To avoid bias and improve trustworthiness, a second coder, a doctoral student who has experience with remote internships, was introduced to establish intercoder reliability and provide feedback on the analysis through peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014; Spall, 1998). During the peer debriefing process, the second coder reviewed and coded the responses under each domain. After a brief discussion between the primary researcher and the doctoral student, minor modifications



were made to the coding of two responses. Coded responses were then reviewed, and themes were identified by the primary researcher. A second peer-debriefing took place where the doctoral student replicated the same process and identified themes in the responses. The primary researcher and the secondary coder met to discuss findings and discrepancies related to the identified themes. Minor modifications took place, consensus was reached, and the themes were finalized. In addition, data triangulation was used to provide multiple perspectives on remote internships from various stakeholders in the human services field (Patton, 2002). The triangulation of data occurred by comparing data and themes from various participant pools, such as students (undergraduate and graduate), faculty, field coordinators, and practitioners, adding to the credibility of the study by strengthening the confidence of our findings (Patton, 2002).

### **Findings**

Participant responses highlighted the multiple strengths (flexibility and skill development) and challenges (lack of in-person interaction, lack of structure, technological issues, privacy, and lack of opportunity) of remote internships. Responses also provided recommendations for human services faculty and shared perspectives about the future role of remote internships in the human services field.

#### **Strengths of Remote Internships**

Participants identified many strengths of remote human services internships. Several participants shared how they believe remote internships would prepare students for the future. One faculty member wrote:

I see remote sessions at our internship sites continuing in some way due to the increase in participation from clients. In our area, transportation is difficult and so is childcare for many of the clients that are seen. Telehealth removes those barriers and increases the availability for clients to be involved in treatment.

Some of the words used to describe remote internships were “engaging,” “flexible,” and “prenominal.” Although there were many identified benefits of remote internships, the most frequently mentioned were flexibility ( $n = 16$ ) and the development of new skills ( $n = 11$ ).

#### ***Flexibility***

The most cited benefit of remote internships was the flexibility they provide. Flexibility was the code used to reference various aspects of remote internships such as the “flexibility of location,” “schedule flexibility,” “flexibility in how and when they do their internship hours,” and “flexibility with rural dwelling human services students.” In addition, respondents mentioned how the flexibility of remote internships might better support those who are “severely limited by their health.” One human services graduate student shared about remote internships, “It makes learning more accessible to students who are also raising/schooling children during the semester, and those that may be dealing with mental/physical disabilities/issues.”

The flexibility to work from any location was also beneficial to participants in two main ways. First, it was economically more feasible. Interns did not have to pay for transportation costs (driving costs were frequently mentioned) or related expenses, such as buying lunch while at their internship. Second, they were not bound by geographic location. Remote internships offered agencies a larger candidate pool and more opportunities for interns to learn from diverse perspectives. Two faculty members shared:

One of the strengths I found was that students had no “geographic” boundaries for locating meaningful internship placements. One of my students was able to work with a nonprofit “virtually” in Ohio. Our institution is located in Pennsylvania, and previously she would have never been able to serve that organization. Additionally,



the sophistication of virtual technologies made it possible for my students to virtually participate in their internship placements day-to-day operations, such as virtual family visits, tele appointments, court, board meetings, etc. Since most employees were working remotely during the pandemic, it did not serve as a barrier for their organization supervisor to include them in the workings of the organization. Also, due to the shortage of workers in the human services field, many sites appreciated have the additional internship supports to help make up for the shortfall.

The other faculty member wrote:

It is very important for our program for our students to have their internship where they would like to live post-graduation. It allows them the opportunity to have experience and references in that area. Since many of our students come to our institution from other places, virtual internships assisted them in that endeavor.

### ***Skill Development***

Although virtual internships might fall short in supporting the development of some interpersonal skills that an in-person internship would provide, remote internships still offer multiple opportunities for skill development. Participants identified several skills that were strengthened through remote internships. One of the most cited skills was the communication skill of active listening; this includes improved active listening through verbal (talking on the phone), non-verbal, and written (emails) means. Substantial increases in technological skills were also frequently mentioned, especially skills related to video conferencing. Additionally, increases in time management and organizational skills were noted.

Skill development was also noted from faculty and field coordinators. One undergraduate faculty member shared,

Yes. I have realized the need to have more check ins with these students [because] not only is their internship virtual, but so too is their actual course. I have to schedule built in virtual touch base opportunities multiple times through the semester.

One faculty member mentioned her plan to incorporate telehealth skill development into her courses and has asked her program advisory committee members and field site supervisors to provide feedback on what they saw as the most important skills to work on. One participant's program used avatar simulations to help students work with clients remotely by role playing with various scenarios, and one faculty member shared his university has already developed a remote human service work course. Another faculty member wrote:

All of my students, virtual or not, were offered full-time employment in their chosen field. Many of the employers appreciated that they were well versed with the new virtual technologies available for working with clients as many offices are still filled with technophobes. Additionally, I think I will be continuing to do "live" office hours [where] all my course students can touch base with me virtually and with each other. Lastly, making sure that students are trained in the platforms that their organizations will be using is also [incredibly] important prior to the start of their internship. Most organizations' orientations have yet to include this aspect of training, so it is important to make sure they are up to speed and feel comfortable prior to starting.

### **Challenges**

Participants identified five main challenges of remote internships. The most noted challenge was lack of in-person interactions with clients and staff ( $n = 13$ ). In order of frequency, other noted challenges were lack of structure ( $n = 10$ ); technological issues ( $n = 7$ ); lack of privacy ( $n = 5$ ); and difficulty finding agencies and supervisors willing to work with students remotely ( $n = 4$ ).



***Lack of In-Person Interaction***

Not being able to meet in person with clients, staff, and supervisors was a common challenge in remote internships. Some participants noted that the lack of in-person interactions made it more difficult to interpret body language, non-verbal cues, and behaviors. One participant wrote, “For those who were working in addiction clinic—not know[ing] for sure if the client was under the influence when their behaviors were off.” Some students shared that their clients would not turn on their cameras during meetings. Relatedly, one student shared, “I feel that it is more challenging to engage with individuals because during remote sessions, they are doing other things or multitasking that they would not normally be doing if meetings were in-person.” There was a feeling among some that they “did not have substantial interaction with others” and missed “getting a feel for the professional culture through human interaction.” Respondents noted lack of “potential camaraderie” and networking opportunities as well as feeling that they would have learned better being in person. Some participants also noted the general lack opportunity to interact with clients, stating that they experienced a “reduced opportunity for clinical work” and “less client interactions.”

***Lack of Structure***

The lack of structure that accompanied remote internship experiences was a challenge for some participants. This included issues such as limited contact with a supervisor (in contrast, some participants shared that they met more frequently with their supervisors); lack of clear directions and expectations; difficulty managing time; and interns being hesitant to ask questions. One field coordinator shared, “The remote internships I supported were not already developed and established—they were bumpy for students.” The limitations on supervision and the ability to ask questions can negatively affect student preparedness for the workforce. A field coordinator their concerns about the lack of structure:

Lack of site or student responsibility for secure communications and documentation, intrusions on the service such as the student’s child or dog interrupting, lack of direct supervision, lack of recording for indirect supervision. Lack of immediate support in a crisis.

Similarly, a practitioner shared, “[Remote interns are] unable to explain jobs needing completed, students don’t ask questions and assume instead which means a lot of unnecessary redoing things happens, unable to check time management.”

***Technological Issues***

Although remote internships can be an equitable option for internship completion, one of the main downsides is the lack of resources. There were noted technological concerns about “access to services for populations/communities that don’t have adequate wi-fi connection” and technological concerns for students. This issue mainly concerned not having adequate technology (e.g., high-speed internet, webcams, specialty software programs) and made remote internships challenging for some interns, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. One faculty member wrote:

The only barriers that I tended to see was the need for high-speed internet at my students’ off campus residences and the need to have a web camera. Since most students have limited budgets and run multiple wireless devices simultaneously, they sometimes did not plan for this increased cost. The students I had were able to make the adjustment and successfully participated in their studies.

***Privacy***

Respondents noted concerns about privacy and confidentiality, both on the part of the intern and the client. At times, interns were unsure whether other people were in the room



with clients when running groups or individual sessions, as well as not “knowing if the client is truly in a safe space to talk.” Students also noted interruptions from their own families and pets. One faculty member expanded on this challenge, writing, “Confidentiality (unsure of who might be at the client’s residence and could overhear group or individual), distraction (client walking around, eating etc.).”

### ***Lack of Opportunity***

Logistically, a few participants said that it was hard to find supervisors and agencies that were willing to work with their programs in a remote environment. One fieldwork coordinator noted that “Many agencies were also experiencing remote work for the first time. Their infrastructure and expectation crafted much of the experience for the students.” Some participants stated that they hope to develop more remote internship opportunities with diverse agencies in the future.

The experience overall has been excellent! Our online students are scattered across the country and some live in very rural areas with limited opportunities. Additionally, many of our online students are adult-learners with other responsibilities which complicate their schedules [and] availability. Before the pandemic, remote internships were limited in terms of supervision, support, and internship responsibilities. Now, many organizations have enhanced their remote internship opportunities, which has opened the door for our students.

### **Recommendations for Faculty**

Participants made several suggestions for how faculty can better support remote internships in the classroom. The following are some participant recommendations, lightly edited for clarity and conciseness:

- Know responsibilities upfront and troubleshoot issues ahead of time (how/who to contact on site, what students will be doing).
- If the fieldwork course is conducted remotely, faculty need to develop patience and increase the use of breakout rooms to encourage interns to share experiences in small groups.
- Weekly check-ins should be mandatory or strongly encouraged.
- The same advice for all internships: communicate clearly and repeatedly, develop a Plan B in case things don’t work out, focus on measurable outcomes (not just effort).
- Role-play practice before seeing clients, both for technology training and feedback (for example, “I can see things in your room that aren’t appropriate for a workspace”).
- Make sure the technology is adequate for both the institution and the student. A good platform is essential, Zoom seemed to be better than others. Be prepared for glitches, both in the technology and the student and site interfaces with the technology. Be flexible and tolerant in receiving and making assignments.
- Prepare students for remote internships! Cover content related to best practices for telecommuting, give students practice with technology requirements and tasks. Research which jobs might have a remote service delivery component and look into the requirements so your curriculum prepares them for what is expected. See what tech support is available to students from the university during remote internships.
- Talk about the isolation, make supervision and self-care topics a priority.



- Use articles that support remote internship skills. Provide space for students to discuss the challenges and realities of remote work. Stay abreast of how this type of work is adding to the human services field.

### **Future of Remote Internships**

For most respondents, remote internships were offered because of restrictions placed by COVID-19. Respondents were asked if they plan to continue offering or participating in remote internships in the future. Over half (53%;  $n = 20$ ) said *maybe*; 37% percent ( $n = 14$ ) said *yes*; and 10% ( $n=4$ ) said *no*. Participants believed that people had seen the benefits that telehealth services could provide. Although telehealth services were not a perfect fit for all, they do provide opportunities for client access, increased opportunities for internships, and flexibility for both the intern and the client. One participant wrote, “[Telehealth services] have opened my mind to possibilities that I never would have considered.” Similarly, another participant wrote:

Huge role. Likely will be an increase in need for [mental health] services, need more people trained! And more people to adapt to the unique impacts of covid (including infection/long haulers, trauma, as well as other social justice issues that have become illuminated from this pandemic, etc.)

Participants also shared how COVID-19 led to the increased awareness of the benefits of telehealth services and the importance of interns being prepared to support these services.

It was not until COVID that agencies fully appreciated or at least understood the need to complete an internship and gain counseling/human services experience virtually through telehealth platforms. Telehealth is becoming more widely accepted and expected from clients; thus, our students need to gain this valuable learning experience.

It is important to note that not all participants supported remote internships. Two responses referred to them as “horrid” and “wretched,” while another participant believed that they can be a good fit for graduate students but they will not be continuing it in their associate-level program. One participant shared, “I am sure they will remain on some level, but for our program, the goal is to go back in person fully next semester.” Many respondents acknowledged both the strengths and limitations of continuing remote internships in the future. One graduate faculty member wrote:

The abrupt integration of the virtual platform made it clear to me how important face-to-face interaction are to human services. At the same time, it brought about an awareness of the potential role, the future role, that technology can play in service delivery and [human services] instruction. Clearly there will continue to be a role for remote interactions in the future of human services.

### **Discussion**

Overall, participants in this study had a positive view of remote internships and found them to be beneficial not only during the pandemic, but also for the future. Several findings about the strengths and challenges from this study align with previous research on remote internships. Identified strengths of remote internships, such as increased flexibility, the development of new skills, economic benefits, and a lack of concern about transportation issues have been previously noted (Briant & Crowther, 2020; Feldman, 2021; Jeske, 2014; Massingill, 2013; Szu-Yu Chen & Speciale, 2020). Similarly, noted challenges such as feeling disconnected from the organization, and needing a high level of autonomy and direct supervision have been previously identified (Massingill, 2013). A challenge Mitchell et al. (2021) previously identified with remote social work internships was that some students did not believe they received adequate client contact. These identified challenges are something



that education programs and internship agencies can continue to work together to improve. Our study provides a glimpse into the current role that remote internships play in the field of human services and the role they will potentially play in the future. Among the participants, remote internships appeared to be a new venture. Most participants had minimal to no experience with remote internships before COVID-19. With an overwhelming majority of participants saying that they plan to, or might continue with remote internships in the future, this is an area that will need further research and support for all stakeholders.

Findings from our study also provide faculty suggestions about how to strengthen the classroom fieldwork experience. Several recommendations were provided, ranging from support needed for telehealth skill development, to curriculum redesign, to strengthening logistical components of the internship process.

While it accounted for a small portion of responses, it is important to note that not all participants viewed remote internships favorably. Some did not like the experience, some felt that they were getting a “less robust experience,” and some just preferred in-person interactions. As the world begins to navigate a new normal currently and in a post-COVID world, the role of remote internships in the human services profession will develop and continued research on best practices will emerge.

As Briant and Crowther (2020) suggested, providing students the option of a remote internship can be viewed as an equitable approach to the fieldwork process. Remote internships can be especially beneficial for those interns who face physical challenges, traditional and non-traditional age students who struggle to balance family and work responsibilities, those who have issues with transportation, or those who might have trouble covering expenses associated with their internships (Briant & Crowther, 2020; Massingill, 2013). Offering students the opportunity to complete their fieldwork requirements remotely might provide them the structure and flexibility they need to be successful (Feldman, 2021). In addition, the challenge of not having access to adequate technology to successfully participate in remote internships might affect minority and low-income students the most (Lederer et al., 2021; Rudenstine et al., 2021). Programs and agencies should continue to work to ensure interns have the equipment and skills needed to successfully complete their internship.

### **Implications**

As human services education programs navigate these uncharted times re-evaluating their program designs and fieldwork offerings, they should discuss how to make internship opportunities more equitable for students. Program faculty and staff might want to discuss the possibility of offering students the option to complete a remote internship, both now and in the future. As previously discussed, internships cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. For some interns, a remote experience might work best, while others prefer (or would do better in) an in-person internship. The possibility of a hybrid model to an internship placement might also be an option to explore. In this approach, students would have a combination of both in-person and remote experiences with the agency. With the likelihood of sustained increases of telework and telehealth services post-COVID, it will be important to prepare students with the skills to meet the demands of the workforce (Feldman, 2021). It is up to individual human services programs to develop fieldwork experiences that best meet the needs of their students and the program’s resources.

### **Limitations**

A lack of previous research on remote human services internships makes this exploratory study an initial investigation into this area. Although study participants shared various viewpoints on remote internships, one limitation is the number of people in the



various roles was relatively small and restricted to members of NOHS. To gain an in-depth understanding of remote internships from the viewpoints of identified parties (e.g., graduate students, field coordinators, faculty members, etc.), further research should be conducted to expand the participant pool. A second limitation is that most responses came from White females. Future researchers should include the perspectives of individuals from different genders and ethnic backgrounds on remote internships and from members and non-members of NOHS.

Additionally, this study relied on voluntary self-reported responses. Future studies evaluating the role of remote internships in human services should also look at quantitative factors, such as completion rates and the evaluation of learning objectives. It is important to note that these remote internships were developed and quickly implemented during a worldwide pandemic (Feldman, 2021). The additional stressors on supervisors, students, and clients cannot be discounted as having an effect on the structure of remote internships and outcomes. It is recommended that this study be replicated in a post-COVID world.

### **Future Research**

Future research on remote internships should identify ways for human services education programs to further develop and strengthen the process for offering their students remote internships to meet their fieldwork requirements. Researchers should look at ways to best support supervisors of remote internships to offer them the tools needed to support their interns as they become human services professionals. Additionally, remote internships should be evaluated against clear and specific standards to assess their ability to support learning outcomes and programmatic goals.

### **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many human services programs to modify their fieldwork offerings to students. As human services education programs navigate current uncertain times and enter a post-COVID world, they might decide to continue some of the novel practices that emerged during the pandemic. One of these practices might be to offer remote human services internships. It is predicted that telehealth services will continue to be a vital part of the human services field, and it will be imperative that students have the tools to meet the needs of their clients in a virtual space. This initial inquiry on remote human services internships is just the beginning. Continued research and development on how to offer quality remote internships based on best practices will be needed to prepare future human services professionals.

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