Student Learning Objectives Assessment (SLOA) Report, Internship Evaluation: Fall 2010-Spring 2011
Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP)
Prepared by Professor Raquel Pinderhughes
Submitted Fall 2012

Introduction

In fall 2010-spring 2011, the coursework for the Urban Studies and Planning Internship Program (603/604) continued to serve students in two departments – Urban Studies & Planning (DUSP) and Political Science (PLSI). Coursework, which is comprised of two courses, is designed to assist the students' transition from academic to professional life. These two courses are: a 3-unit course (USP/PLSI 603) for field experience; and a 1-unit seminar course (USP/PLSI 604) for professional development, that enables students to reflect upon and analyze their field experience. As the course numbers suggest, both courses were cross-listed between DUSP and PLSI. Three faculty members, two from DUSP and one from PLSI taught these courses on a rotating basis. Although most students in both departments possess work experience, only a few have experience working in the professional fields they hope to pursue after graduation. Thus, most DUSP and PLSI students are unfamiliar with the transition from working in non-career ladder jobs and/or being a student to being employed in demanding and challenging professional positions and, it is in this context, that these courses are a critical component of the core requirements for the Urban Studies major.

The internship process

The internship experience begins when students attend a meeting in the semester *preceding* the semester in which they enroll in the internship courses. In this meeting, which is held every semester, students learn about the process of selecting an internship aligned with their academic preparation and individual career objectives. Students who are unable to attend this mandatory meeting are required to meet individually with the faculty member teaching the course in their department, to learn about the course requirements and discuss their professional aspirations and post-graduation plans. Following the meeting, DUSP faculty members assist students in both departments to identify appropriate internship possibilities with the goal of obtaining high quality internships.

After students secure internships linked to their professional goals, they register for the field work (USP/PLSI 603) and seminar (USP/PLSI 604) courses which they must take simultaneously. Typically, one section of each course is offered in fall and two sections in spring. Combining professional field experience and classroom discussions helps students strengthen both their professional and academic skills, and reflect closely on their professional experiences. Some in-class assignments include: a) conducting informational interviews with professionals working in fields close to the careers they plan to pursue; b) preparing a professional resume and cover letter; c) identifying professional strengths and weaknesses, and devising a plan for to address weak areas; and d) simulating mock job interviews in their areas of professional interest. The intern supervisor assigns the grade for the 3-unit course (USP/PLSI 603) based on an intern's performance at work, while the course instructor gives the grade for the 1-unit course (USP/PLSI 604) which reflects the intern's performance in the internship seminar.

Enrollment, 2010-2011

Altogether 37 students enrolled in the internship courses during the academic year 2010-11 (Table 1) in 30 different organizations (Appendix Table A2). In Fall 2010, 32 students took the internship course, while in Spring 2011, 5 students enrolled in the internship course.

Table 1. Internship enrollment 2010-2011

	Section 1	Section 2	Total
Fall 2010	13	19	32
Spring 2011	5	—	5
2010-2011			37

Evaluating student performance

In each semester, the internship supervisors are required to evaluate the professional qualities and performance of their respective interns for the course grade for USP/PLSI 603. Both instructors of the two sections of the internship course use the same evaluation form to gather supervisors' opinions. The evaluation form requires a supervisor to assess a student's overall performance, ability to learn, creativity and initiative, reliability, and teamwork ability, besides various other aspects about the intern's preparedness for professional employment. Intern supervisors can now choose to fill out an electronic form and email it to the supervisor in addition to the paper form. Next we present what we learned from our analysis of the supervisors' evaluation data for the academic year 2010-2011.

Analysis of supervisor evaluation data for 2010-2011

This section presents a short discussion about the aggregate and descriptive statistics of qualitative variables from the individual supervisor evaluations. As stated previously, 37 students enrolled in the internship courses in Fall 2010 and Spring 2011. However, complete data was available for only 34 students. This explains why this analysis reports on only 34 students. For most qualitative questions in the questionnaire, supervisors could choose from six categories – *excellent, very good, good, fair, poor,* and *N/A* (for not applicable/available). The percentages listed in the tables and graphs presented here are rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Table 2. Key performance indicators of USP interns during academic year 2010-2011

| 2010-11 USP 603	Internship Evaluations (in %) N = 34*										
Performance indicator	**Excellent**	**Very good**	**Good**	**Fair**	**Poor**	**N/A**	**Total %****				
Overall performance	65	26	6	3	0	0	100				
Ability to learn	65	29	3	3	0	0	100				
Initiative & creativity	47	32	15	6	0	0	100				
Reliability	62	32	3	3	0	0	100				
Teamwork ability	65	29	3	0	0	3	100				
Research skills	56	32	12	0	0	0	100				
Analytic skills	38	35	24	3	0	0	100				
Presentation skills	41	24	32	3	0	0	100				
Knowledge of agency's primary area of work	35	26	29	6	3	0	99				
Overall supervisor's grade	**A**	**A-**	**B+**	**B**	**B-**	**C+**	**C**	**C-**	**I**	**Total %**	
	65	6	12	17	0	0	0	0	0	100	

*There were 37 students, but the analysis is based on N=34 since all evaluations did not offer these responses.

The data point toward overall superior performance by the student interns during the academic year 2010-11. There are nine key performance indicators in the questionnaire: i) *overall performance*; ii) *ability to learn*; iii) *initiative and creativity*; iv) *reliability*; v) *ability to work in teams*; vi) *research skills*; vii) *analytic skills*; viii) *presentation skills*; ix) and *knowledge about the substantive area of work of the organization*. The last four indicators are specifically meant to assess the quality and nature of an intern's professional preparedness stemming from her academic training. Table 2 presents aggregate statistics on the key performance indicators in the questionnaire from both semesters. Figure 1 also conveys this information graphically. Semester-wise data are available in the Appendix (Tables A1-A2; and Figures A1-A2). Generally, the Fall 2010 cohort performed slightly better (as illustrated by the proportion of just *excellent* as well as combined *excellent* and *very good* counts) than that of Spring 2011 on all indicators except two – *initiative and creativity*, and *knowledge about the substantive area of work of the organization*.

Figure 1. Key performance indicators of USP interns during academic year 2010-2011
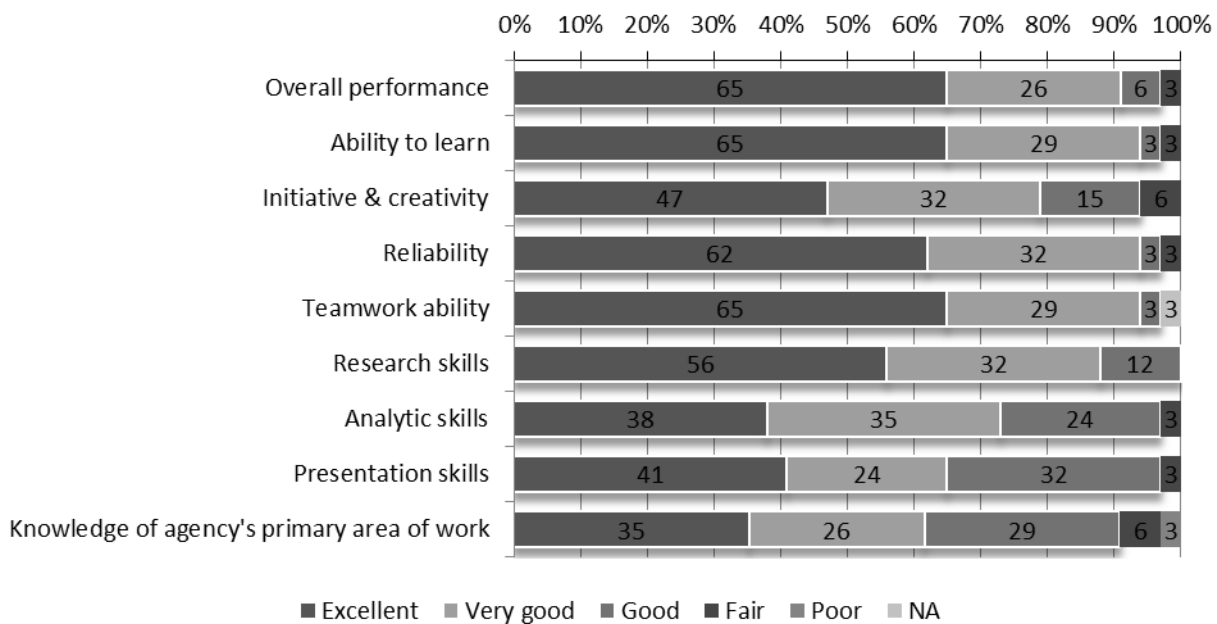
The *overall performance* of almost 91% of the students was considered to be *very good* or *excellent*. No intern's *overall performance* or performance on any other indicator was viewed as *poor*, and on only three percent out of the nine specific performance indicators did the interns receive a *poor* grade – with the highest proportion of *fair* performance for any indicator being just four percent. These three indicators were *overall performance*, *ability to learn*, *initiative and creativity*, *reliability*, *analytic skills* and *presentation skills*. While the *fair* grade on the first two of these three indicators could be due to variability in innate individual characteristics, it can be reasonably expected that performance on the *presentation skills* can be raised by improved academic training. The distribution of course grades assigned by the supervisors also suggests that the overall performance of the interns was of a very high quality (Table 2 and Figure 2). Seventy-one percent (71%) of the interns received a grade of "A-" or higher. An overwhelming majority of sixty-five percent (65%) received an "A" grade. No students

received grades lower than a "B-". Specific supervisor comments also support our conclusion that the overall performance of our interns during 2010-2011 was of a consistently high standard. For example, supervisors remarked in the following ways about their respective interns' overall performance:

"I cannot think of one instance that I had to go to [J] and correct any of the work he had performed. [J]'s work always exceeded my expectations."

"At the beginning of the internship, I sat down with [M] and asked her to help design her project. She was full of ideas and innovative ways to connect our policy work to the larger community."

"[K]'s research skills and synthesis of data were outstanding and his paper, soon to be published, will be of very high quality and I'm proud to put our organization's logo on it."

Figure 2. Distribution of course grades assigned by supervisors, 2010-2011
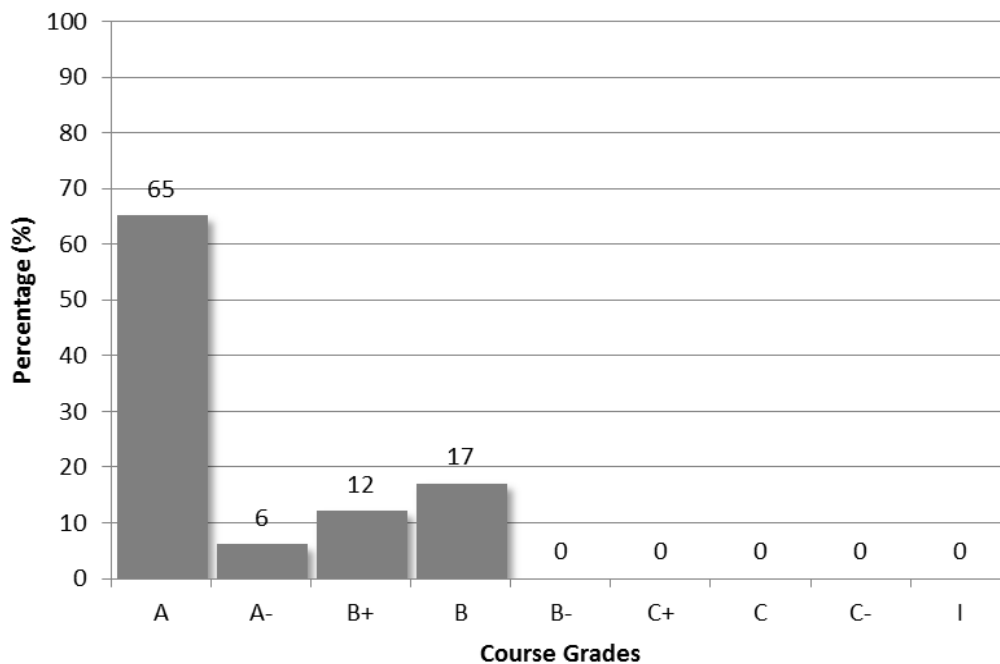
For every performance indicator supervisors mostly found the interns' performance to be *very good* or *excellent*. This proportion ranges from about sixty-one percent to about ninety-four percent for any indicator. In fact, for the indicators that measure an intern's performance on the job directly (*overall performance, ability to learn, initiative and creativity, reliability,* and *ability to work in teams*), a high majority, sixty-five (65%), was deemed *excellent* for every indicator save *initiative and creativity*, for which that proportion was just under fifty percent (47%). Comparatively low *Initiative and creativity* levels could be for one of two plausible reasons – a) in these times when getting even an internship is quite difficult, students might be interning in agencies or positions not of their liking; or b) they might be working on tasks that they perceive as mundane and not stimulating or challenging enough. However, a specific comment from a supervisor also reflects that initiative and creativity:

"[L] has improved my presentations with her Power Point skills. Before [L] came to our organization, we would contract out much of work. She has saved our organization funds due to her expertise. She is very

professional in her correspondences. [L] has created many internal templates that are used on a daily basis. She is comfortable with both PC and Mac platforms. [L]'s bilingual ability brings new opportunities to the organization. Her ability to speak Spanish to clients, have brought new clients to our organization."

Relative to the specifically direct indicators of on-the-job performance, those indicators that more closely capture an intern's educational preparedness and specific skills (*research skills*, *analytic skills*, and *presentation skills*) suggest room for further improvement. Even for these three indicators the majority of interns indeed received a grade of *very good* or *excellent* – ranging from about sixty-five percent (65% for *presentation skills*) to eighty-eight percent (for *research skills*). However, compared to the other indicators, a significantly lower proportion was deemed excellent for these three education and skills related indicators. With the proportion of *excellent* ranging from about thirty-eight percent (for *analytic skills)* to thirty-five percent (for *knowledge of agency's work*), the majority of interns was not deemed *excellent* for any of these indicators. This clearly indicates that these skills of our students can be further improved. Among research, analytic, and presentation skills, we find that the students' research skills (which commonly include web-based and archival research, data analysis, survey research, and GIS) are fairly well developed. Similarly, their ability to learn appear to be quite satisfying as evidenced by the majority of interns being viewed as at least *very good*. Compared to these two sets of skills the students' analytic skills are markedly felt as being weak. Twenty-four percent interns' presentation skills were felt to be *very good*, the proportion – forty-one – of those whose presentation skills were considered to be *excellent* is the least for that category across all the indicators. Presented below are comments from two supervisors talking about the presentation skills of their interns:

"[L] has improved my presentations with her Power Point skills. Before [L] came to our organization, we would contract out much of work. She has saved our organization funds due to her expertise. She is very professional in her correspondences. [L] has created many internal templates that are used on a daily basis. She is comfortable with both PC and Mac platforms. [L]'s bilingual ability brings new opportunities to the organization. Her ability to speak Spanish to clients, have brought new clients to our organization."

"[M] seemed very well prepared in practical skills absolutely necessary for this position, including researching background information, obtaining information from various sources and staff, analyzing information, writing and also public speaking."

The comments above appear to indicate that the relatively weak scores for interns' *presentation skills* pertain more to their oral communication and writing skills; whereas, our students demonstrate strong skills for undertaking independent or directed research, as well as good graphic skills.

Unfortunately, only 35% of the interns were viewed as having excellent knowledge about the substantive area of work of the organization. Since the majority of the students chose organizations that work with planning/planning related issues or with important urban issues/challenges that are covered in DUSP courses (see Appendix Table A2), and because a student is expected to choose an internship in an area of her individual professional interest(s), the proportion of *excellent* evaluations should definitely be higher. At the same time, we know that securing an internship is extremely competitive, and many students (although we do not know exactly how many) are unable to obtain the internship of their choice. Working in an organization that was not a student's top choice or in an area about which the student has little or only cursory knowledge would obviously not help the student to be well-informed about the organization's work. The objective of this internship program is to familiarize students with different areas/sectors of work, agencies, as well as just simply working in professional settings dealing with planning and other urban issues. Thus, as long as a student's awareness about an organization or a specific sector is enhanced by the internship, and it helps her acquire new skills and

knowledge, we feel that the internship experience is worthwhile. The following are some comments that substantiate our concerns as well as confidence in regard to students' knowledge about the areas of work of their respective organizations.

> "I think [J] had limited understanding of redevelopment before she interned in the Housing Division. I think she is leaving with much greater knowledge of the work required to do affordable housing."

> "[M]'s experience could be supplemented and strengthened by continued education on the state and regional mandates and legislative requirements that often drive planning and development procedures at the local level such as: CEQA, General Plan requirements, planning and zoning laws and subdivision map act requirements, etc

> "A serious candidate needs to be able to understand site plans and blueprints, especially setbacks, lot coverage, etc. They need to know what a general plan is and how it relates to the zoning ordinance (and how to use them). They also need to be able to take technical information and present it at a 9th grade or less level."

Summary

Our analysis of the internship courses for the academic year 2010-2011 (Fall 2010 and Spring 2011) leads us to conclude that the internship courses are meeting both the departments and the students objectives well. Compared to the figures from previous year, data from Spring 2010 indicate improved performance. Improvement over the previous year is visible in *ability to learn, reliability, teamwork ability, research skills, analytic skills, presentation skill* and *knowledge of agency's primary area of work*. In comparison to the Spring 2010 data, seven of the nine performance indicator categories within the 2010-2011 academic year have improved. Most dramatically data from the 2009-2010 academic years, *presentations skills* have improved in *excellence* at fifty-eight percent increase.

The improved overall performance, specific indicators of educational preparedness and training, i.e. *research, analytic,* and *presentation skills* improved than the corresponding ones for the previous year (*excellent* scores ranged from 37% to 26% in 2009-2010, while in 2010-2011 that range was 56% to 41%). This is an indication of great improvement.

Thus, in 2009-2010 the proportion of those who were *excellent* or *very good* in their research and analytic skills rose nearly twenty percent over the preceding year. This indicates a trend towards excellence. Thus, we need to sustain the existing emphasis on honing research, analytic, and presentation skills.

Presentation skills, still, clearly require more directed attention. Absolute and relative measures as well as qualitative comments from supervisors substantiate this conclusion. What must also be noted is that our students' visual or graphic communication skills (especially, PowerPoint) are quite strong. This means that requiring students to make in-class presentations of their research papers and other assignments is contributing to their being prepared for the internship. It is the relative weaknesses in our students' writing and oral communication skills that seem to not meet their supervisors' expectations. Generating more oral communication through participatory discussions and debates in class, or introducing exercises that emphasize speaking to a small group or in public in various courses might help to polish oral communication skills. DUSP seminar courses – the Senior Seminar and the Internship Seminar – indeed provide ample opportunities for improving one's oral communication ability, but students usually take them after or during their actual internship experience. Thus more oral communication should be folded into all core and elective courses. Writing skills seem to be improving on the whole. Also, with USP 401, Seminar in Urban Studies and Planning,

having become the core foundational course, in addition to its being the GWAR course, we definitely feel that the overall writing proficiency of our students will continue to improve. Furthermore, owing to its small class size, unique format, and as a course suggested for the student in her first year itself, USP 401 presents a real opportunity to focus on all three measures of educational preparedness – research, analytic, and presentation skills.

Knowledge about the substantive area of work of an intern's agency was another area where less than a third of the interns were rated as excellent – the second lowest among all indicators. This fact had also emerged from the analyses in earlier versions of this report from the past two years. We do not believe that this is necessarily a sign of any sort of weakness, although such could be the case with certain individuals. Instead we feel that this is symptomatic of the desperate competition for internships during tough economic times. Not only does it take longer for students to get absorbed, most of them fail to get an internship in their agency or area of choice. We choose to look at this more optimistically though. Not only is any relevant professional experience better than none at all, working in a somewhat unfamiliar agency or area contributes to expanding one's knowledge, experience, and skills bases. In the worst year of the worst economic recession in modern history, fifty-five internship placements in thirty-five different agencies, mostly related to urban planning and governance, undoubtedly provides cheer and offers promise.

Appendix

Table A1. Key performance indicators of USP interns, Fall 2010 & Spring 2011

Fall 2010		Internship Evaluations (%) N = 29*						
Performance indicator	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A	Total %**	
Overall performance	66	28	3	3	0	0	100	
Ability to learn	69	28	0	3	0	0	100	
Initiative & creativity	52	24	17	7	0	0	100	
Reliability	62	34	0	3	0	0	99	
Teamwork ability	69	24	3	0	0	3	99	
Research skills	58	28	14	0	0	0	100	
Analytic skills	41	28	28	3	0	0	100	
Presentation skills	41	28	28	3	0	0	100	
Knowledge of agency's primary area of work	38	24	28	7	3	0	100	

Spring 2011		Internship Evaluations (%) N = 5						
Performance indicator	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A	Total %**	
Overall performance	60	20	20	0	0	0	100	
Ability to learn	40	40	20	0	0	0	100	
Initiative & creativity	20	80	0	0	0	0	100	
Reliability	60	20	20	0	0	0	100	
Teamwork ability	40	60	0	0	0	0	100	
Research skills	40	60	0	0	0	0	100	
Analytic skills	20	80	0	0	0	0	100	
Presentation skills	40	0	60	0	0	0	100	
Knowledge of agency's primary area of work	20	40	40	0	0	0	100	

Grade Distribution (in %)										
Overall supervisor's grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	I	Total %
Fall 2010	66	7	10	17	0	0	0	0	0	100
Spring 2011	60	0	20	20	0	0	0	0	0	100

*There were 32 students in Fall, but N=29 as these data were not available in all responses.

**Total % may not be 100 due to rounding.

N/A= Not applicable/no response; I = Incomplete

Table A2. List of internship placements, 2010-2011

Agency/Organization	Fall 2010	Spring 2011
AC Transit	✓	
Architecture for Humanity	✓	
Asian, Inc.	✓	
Assemblywoman Fiona Ma	✓	
Capella Cares	✓	
City & County of San Francisco, Office of John Avalos	✓	
City of Livermore		✓
City of Livingston	✓	
City of Richmond	✓	
Coastside Hope	✓	
Eden Housing	✓	
Equality California	✓	
Friends of the Urban Forest	✓	
Greenbelt Alliance	✓	
Habitot Children's Museum		✓
Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco	✓	
Japantown Task Force, Inc.		✓
KALW, Local Public Radio Station in San Francisco	✓	
Live Oak Landscape Construction Co.	✓	
Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC)	✓	
PODER (People Organizing Environmental & Economic Rights	✓	
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition	✓	
San Francisco Board of Supervisors	✓	✓
San Francisco Department on the Status of Women	✓	
San Francisco Great Streets Project	✓	
San Francisco Planning Department	✓	
San Francisco Redevelopment Agency	✓	✓
Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations	✓	
US Department of Housing and Urban Development	✓	
Yackzan Group, Inc.	✓	

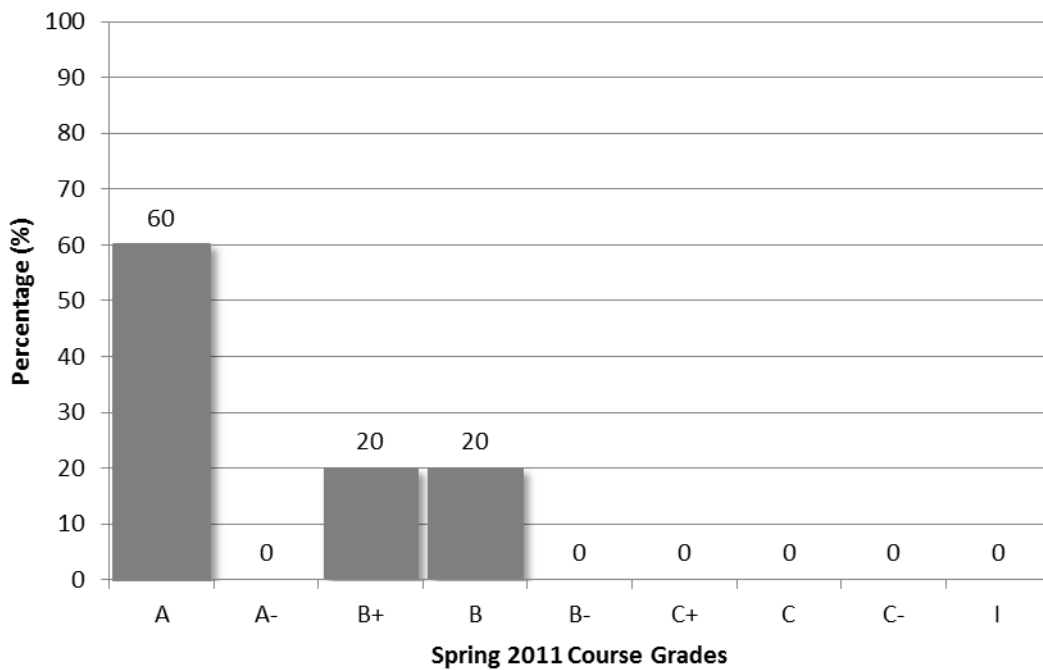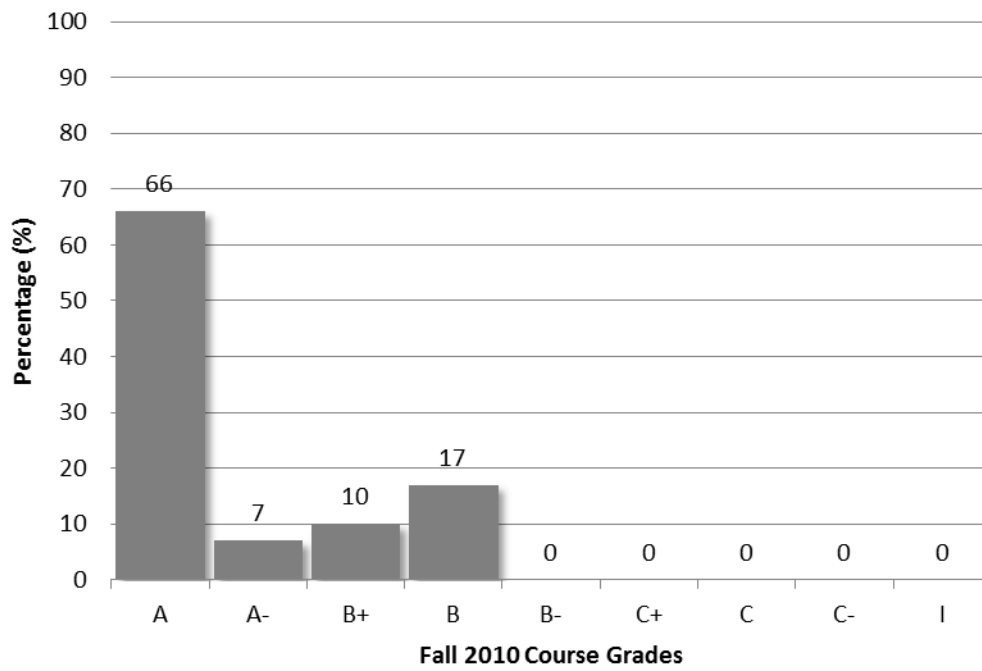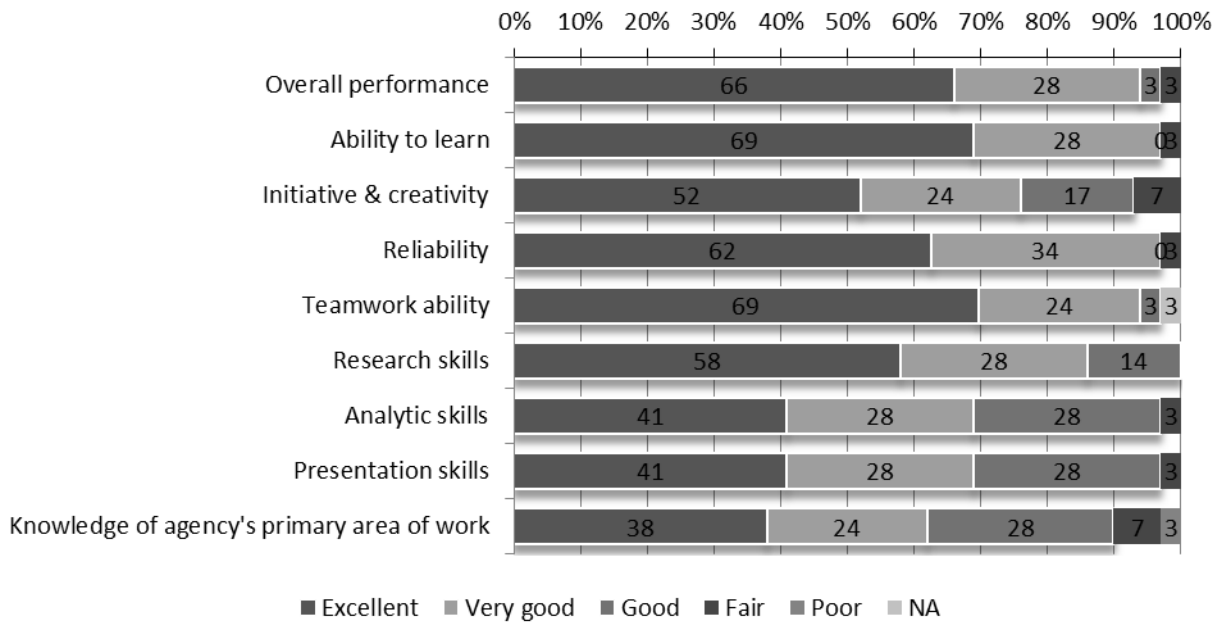**Figure A1. Distribution of course grades assigned by supervisors, Fall 2010 & Spring 2011**

Figure A2. Key performance indicators of USP interns, Fall 2010 & Spring 2011

Fall 2010

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	NA
Overall performance	66	28	3	3		
Ability to learn	69	28	0	3		
Initiative & creativity	52	24	17	7		
Reliability	62	34	0	3		
Teamwork ability	69	24	3	3		
Research skills	58	28	14			
Analytic skills	41	28	28	3		
Presentation skills	41	28	28	3		
Knowledge of agency's primary area of work	38	24	28	7	3	

■ Excellent ■ Very good ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Poor ■ NA

Spring 2011

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	NA
Overall performance	60	20	20			
Ability to learn	40	40	20			
Initiative & creativity	20	80				
Reliability	60	20	20			
Teamwork ability	40	60				
Research skills	40	60				
Analytic skills	20	80				
Presentation skills	40	0	60			
Knowledge of agency's primary area of work	20	40	40			

■ Excellent ■ Very good ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Poor ■ NA