

Student Learning Objectives Assessment (SLOA) Report, Internship Evaluation: Fall 2011-Spring 2012
Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP)
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Introduction

In fall 2011-spring 2012, 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, 2011-2012

All together 33 students enrolled in the internship course during the academic year 2011-12. In Fall 2011, 19 students took the internship course, in Spring 2012, 14 students enrolled in the internship course. All together, they were placed in 21 in different organizations (Appendix Table A2).

Evaluating student performance

Internship supervisors are required to evaluate the professional qualities and performance of their respective interns for the course grade for USP/PLSI 603 using an evaluation form developed by the Urban Studies and Planning Program. All faculty teaching the internship courses use the same evaluation form to gather data from supervisors. The evaluation form requires the supervisor to assess a student's overall performance, ability to learn, creativity and initiative, reliability, and teamwork ability, as well as various other aspects of the intern's preparedness for professional employment. Intern supervisors can fill out the evaluation electronically or on paper. Below, we summarize what we learned from our analysis of the supervisors' evaluation data for the academic year 2011-12.

Analysis of supervisor evaluation data for 2011-2012

This section presents a short discussion about the aggregate and descriptive statistics of qualitative variables from the individual supervisor evaluations. As stated previously, 33 students enrolled in the internship courses in Fall 2011 and Spring 2012. However, complete data was available for only 27 students. This explains why this analysis reports on only 27 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 1. Key performance indicators of USP interns during academic year 2011-2012

2011-2012 USP 603		Internship Evaluations (in %) N = 27*						Total %**		
Performance indicator	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A				
Overall performance	74	15	7	0	4	0	100			
Ability to learn	70	15	11	4	0	0	100			
Initiative & creativity	48	33	11	4	4	0	100			
Reliability	67	22	7	0	4	0	100			
Teamwork ability	70	22	0	7	0	0	99			
Research skills	55	30	15	0	0	0	100			
Analytic skills	44	37	15	0	0	4	100			
Presentation skills	55	19	19	4	0	4	101			
Knowledge of agency's primary area of work	37	33	22	4	0	4	100			
Overall supervisor's grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	I	Total %
	59	19	11	7	0	0	0	4	0	100

*There were 33 students, but the analysis is based on N=27 since all evaluations did not offer these responses.

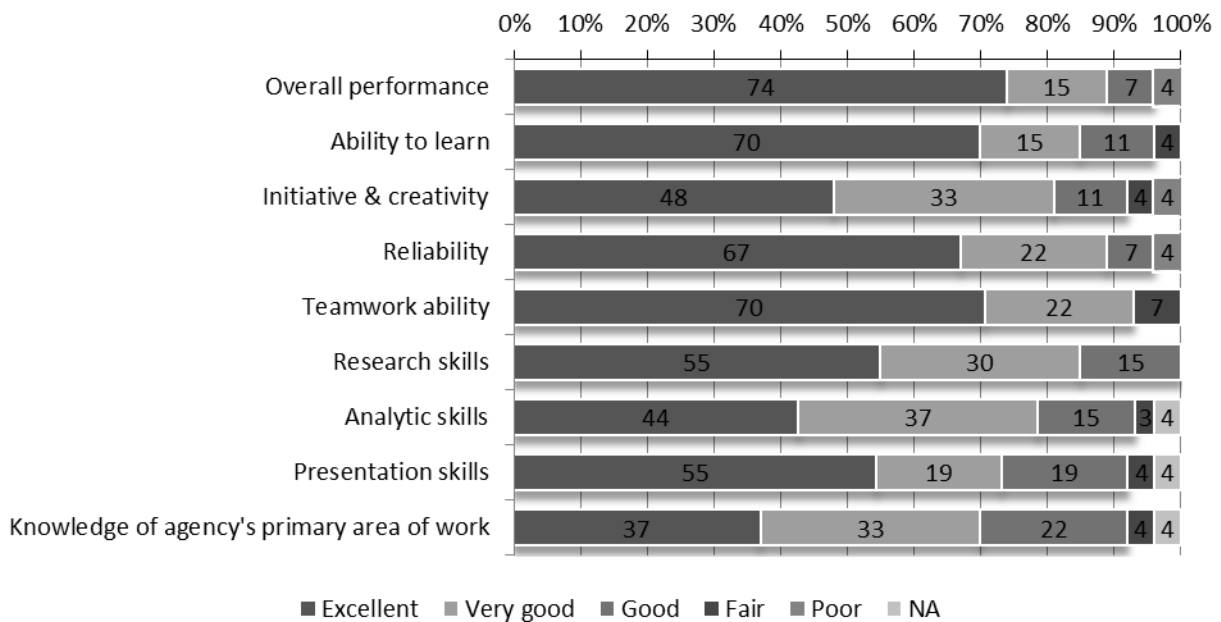
**Total % may not be 100 due to rounding.

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

The data point toward overall superior performance by the student interns during the academic year 2011-12. 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 1 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). The Spring 2012 cohort performed better (as illustrated by the proportion of just *excellent* as well as combined *excellent* and *very good* counts) than that of Fall 2011 on all indicators except one -- knowledge of agency’s primary area of work.

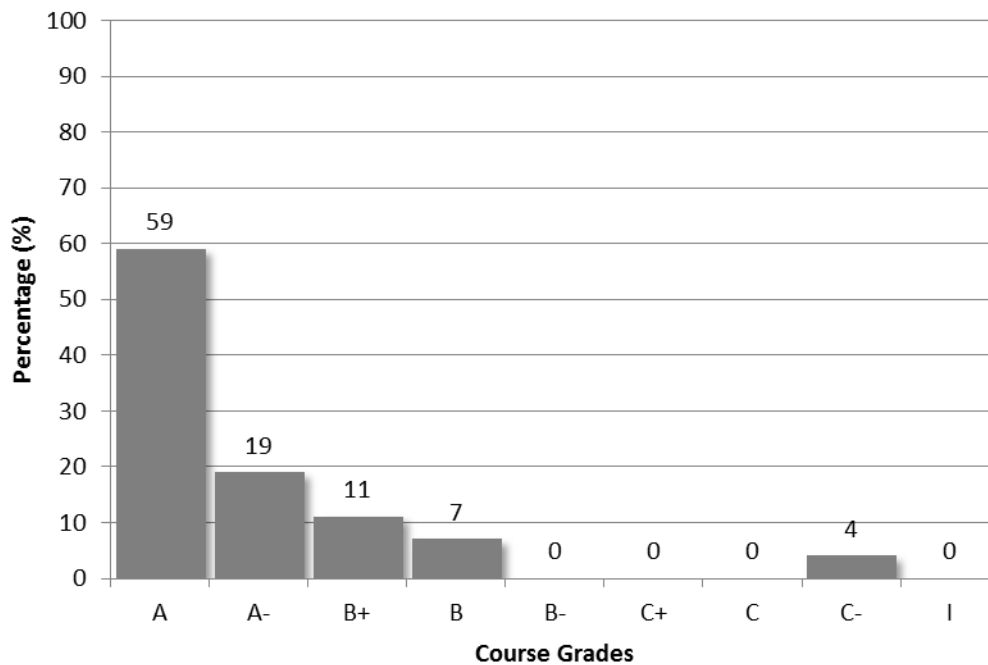
Figure 1. Key performance indicators of USP interns during academic year 2011-2012



The *overall performance* of almost 96% of the students was considered to be *good, very good or excellent*. No intern’s *overall performance* or performance on any other indicator was viewed as *poor*, with the highest proportion of *fair* performance for any indicator averaged to four percent. These indicators were *ability to learn, initiative and creativity, reliability, teamwork ability, analytic skills, presentation skills* and *knowledge of agency’s primary area of work*. While the *fair* grade on these indicators could be due to variability in innate individual characteristics, it can be reasonably expected that performance on the *presentation skills* and *analytic 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 1 and Figure 2). Almost eighty percent (78%) of the interns received a grade of “A-” or higher. An overwhelming majority of 59% received an “A” grade. No students received grades lower than a “B-”. Specific supervisor comments support our conclusion that the overall performance of our interns during 2009-2010 was of a consistently high standard. One supervisor stated:

“ [A] was always eager to lend a helping hand and she produced high quality work. Many of her tasks required that she draft presentations in PowerPoint, draft workshop flyers, create community websites/Facebook pages and present “how-to” trainings to staff and community members. With these tasks, she was able to integrate her creativity and initiate dialog as to how to improve existing projects/programs.”

Figure 2. Distribution of course grades assigned by supervisors, 2011-2012



For every performance indicator supervisors mostly found the interns’ performance to be *very good* or *excellent*. This proportion ranges from about 70% to about 92% 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, seventy percent was deemed *excellent* for every indicator save *initiative and creativity*, for which that proportion was just under fifty percent (48%). 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 outside their areas of expertise; or b) they might be working on tasks that they perceive as mundane and not stimulating or challenging enough.

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 received a grade of *very good* or *excellent* – ranging from seventy-four percent (74% for *presentation skills*) to eighty-five percent (for *research skills*). However, compared to the other indicators, a significantly lower proportion were deemed excellent for these three education and skills related indicators. With the proportion of *excellent* ranging from about thirty-seven percent (for *knowledge of agency’s primary area of work*) to forty-eight percent (for *initiative and creativity*), 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 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 analytic skills 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’ taking initiative and practicing creativity are markedly felt as being weak. While only 19% of interns’ presentation skills were felt to be *very good*, the proportion – fifty-five – of those whose presentation skills were

considered to be *excellent* is the least for that category across all the indicators. One supervisor, commenting on the presentation skills of their intern, stated:

“[J] is capable of excellent presentation, but needs to focus and spend the time necessary to meet the audience needs. For our Trillink website work I needed to help him understand how to make more interesting narrative trail descriptions, but he learned this well and descriptions toward the end of his internship we of much higher quality.”

Overall, it appears that the relatively mixed scores for interns’ *presentation skills* pertain more to their oral communication and writing skills; with students demonstrating strong skills for undertaking independent or directed research, as well as good graphic skills.

Finally, as with presentation skills, only 37% of the interns were viewed as having excellent knowledge about the substantive area of work of the organization. *This appears to be another relatively weak aspect of students’ preparedness for the internships.* 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 be higher. At the same time, it is important to note, that securing an internship is extremely competitive today, 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 might explain why a student is not well-informed about, or does not possess, the types of skills required for this organization. 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 our confidence, in regard to students’ knowledge about the areas of work of their respective organizations.

“I believe some of the best educational preparation comes from an internship experience. I think internships as a requirement for all degrees enriches a student’s experience and insight on how to apply knowledge gained in the classroom. I think [G] would benefit from being a little more vocal on initializing things that spark her interest.”

“[P] was very good at understanding databases and the data entry process. In the future, [P] could learn more about the overall research process and how to structure analyses to answer policy-relevant questions. We understand that this takes time and experience to learn, and [P] is doing very well as an undergraduate.”

“There are a number of areas that she could benefit from learning more about, including the environmental review, labor standards, construction contract bidding, the basics of architecture.”

Summary

Overall, our analysis of supervisor’s evaluations of our students for academic year 2011-2012 (Fall 2011 and Spring 2012) indicates that, although there are clearly areas which need to be strengthened, the course is meeting our departments and our students objectives well. Compared to the figures from previous year, data from 2010-2011 indicate both growth and improved performance in all nine performance indicator categories. Improvement over the previous year is visible in *overall performance* (a thirteen percentage-points increase in *excellent* scores).

In the worst year of the worst economic recession in modern history, 33 internship placements in 21 different agencies, almost all of which are directly related to the professional interests of our students in urban planning and governance, provides cheer and offers promise.

We are pleased to see that our students' visual and 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. At the same time, we must take note of the need to strengthen our student's presentation skills and, of the relative weaknesses in our students' writing and oral communication skills. With USP 401, Seminar in Urban Studies and Planning, becoming the core foundational course, and our department's GWAR course, we definitely feel that the overall writing proficiency of our students will improve. The small class size, unique format of USP 401 presents a real opportunity to focus on all three measures of educational preparedness – research, analytic, and presentation skills. Encouraging more oral communication through participatory discussions and presentations in class will help to strengthen students oral communication skills. DUSP seminar courses – the Senior Seminar and the Internship Seminar – provide ample opportunities for improving one's oral communication ability, but students are required to take this course after their internship experience.

Appendix

Table A1. Key performance indicators of USP interns, Fall 2011 & Spring 2012

Fall 2011		Internship Evaluations (%)					
		N = 17*					
Performance indicator	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A	Total %**
Overall performance	65	24	6	0	6	0	101
Ability to learn	65	18	12	6	0	0	101
Initiative & creativity	41	35	12	6	6	0	100
Reliability	59	24	12	0	6	0	101
Teamwork ability	76	18	0	6	0	0	100
Research skills	65	18	18	0	0	0	101
Analytic skills	53	29	18	0	0	0	100
Presentation skills	65	12	18	0	0	6	101
Knowledge of agency's primary area of work	41	47	6	6	0	0	100
Spring 2012		Internship Evaluations (%)					
		N = 10*					
Performance indicator	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	N/A	Total %**
Overall performance	90	0	10	0	0	0	100
Ability to learn	80	10	10	0	0	0	100
Initiative & creativity	60	30	10	0	0	0	100

Reliability	80	20	0	0	0	0	100
Teamwork ability	60	30	0	10	0	0	100
Research skills	40	50	10	0	0	0	100
Analytic skills	30	50	10	0	0	10	100
Presentation skills	40	30	20	10	0	0	100
Knowledge of agency's primary area of work	30	10	50	0	0	10	100

Grade Distribution (in %)

Overall supervisor's grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	I	Total %
Fall 2011	53	18	18	6	0	0	0	6	0	101
Spring 2012	70	20	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	100

*There were 19 students in Fall and 14 students in Spring, but N=27 as these data were not available in all responses.

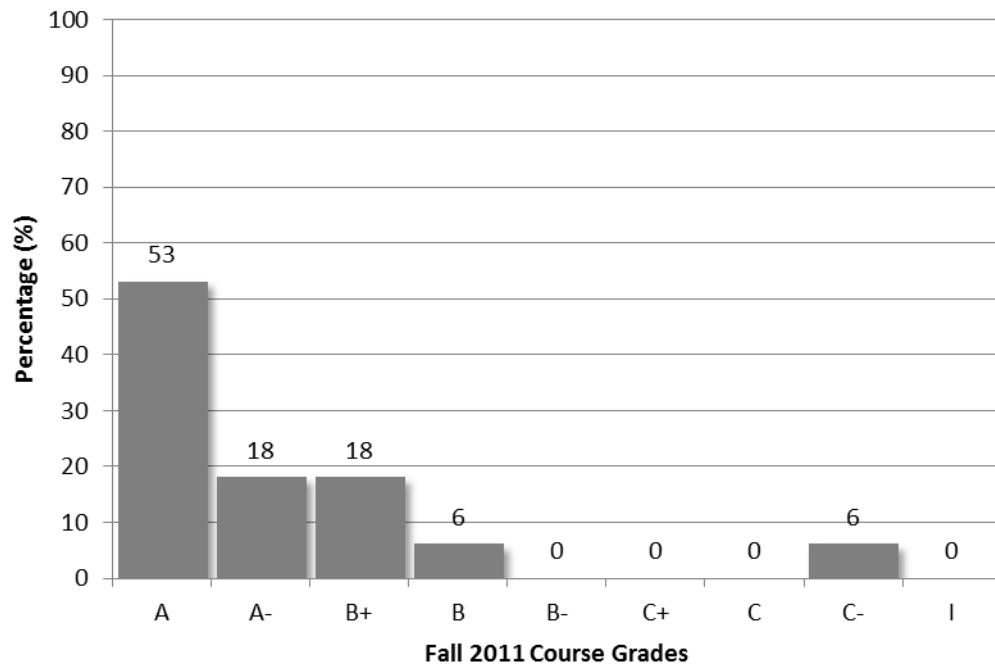
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N/A= Not applicable/no response; I = Incomplete

Table A2. List of internship placements, 2011-2012

Agency/Organization	Fall 2011	Spring 2012
Architecture for Humanity	✓	
Asian, Inc.	✓	
City and County of San Francisco Mayor's Office	✓	
Foundation for a College Education		✓
Friends of the Urban Forest	✓	
Mission Hiring Hall	✓	✓
National Radio Project/Making Contact	✓	
One World Children's Fund	✓	
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy		✓
San Francisco Board of Supervisors	✓	
San Francisco Housing Action Coalition (SFHAC)	✓	✓
San Francisco Human Rights Commission	✓	✓
San Francisco Information Clearinghouse		✓
San Francisco Living Wage Coalition		✓
San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing, Community Development Division	✓	
San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency (SFMTA)		✓
San Francisco Planning Department	✓	
SF State Institute for Civic & Community Engagement		✓
UC Berkeley Safe Transportation Research & Education Center	✓	
Walk San Francisco	✓	
Zephyr Real Estate		✓

Figure A1. Distribution of course grades assigned by supervisors, Fall 2011 & Spring 2012



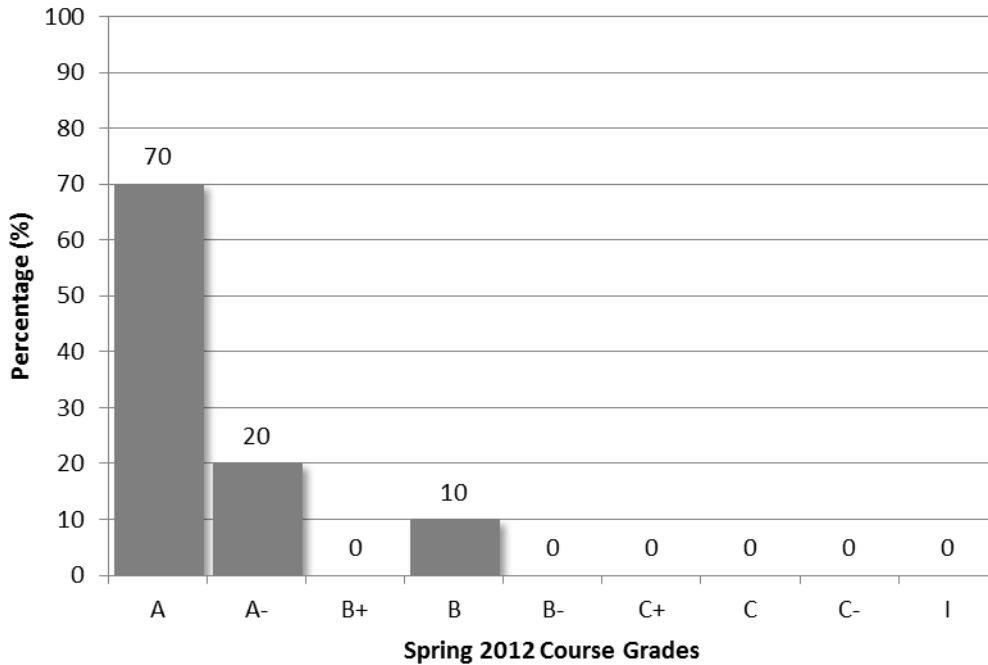
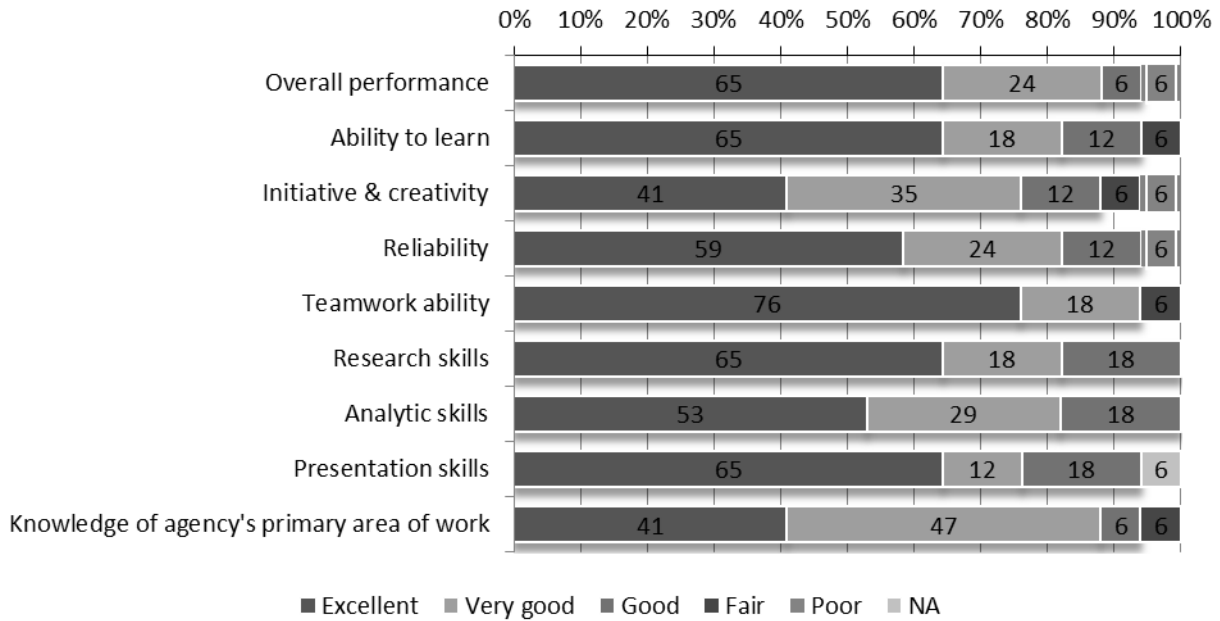


Figure A2. Key performance indicators of USP interns, Fall 2011 & Spring 2012

Fall 2011



Spring 2012

