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Recruiting Future STEM Teachers through Summer Internship Program

Monica Wong-Ratcliff[1] & Marie-Anne Mundy[2]

Abstract

The shortage of highly qualified STEM teachers has risen to a national concern. This article discusses the endeavor of a university in South Texas in recruiting future STEM teachers through the NSF Robert Noyce Summer Internship Program. The four-week paid internship program provided the undergraduate STEM majors with the opportunity to observe and participate in STEM education. The findings from the surveys indicated that the internship program made a positive impact on the interns. Their interest in teaching in the STEM area increased because of the Noyce Summer Internship Program. Owing to the positive experiences, a majority of the Noyce Interns decided to pursue teaching certificates to become high school STEM teachers.

Keywords: Internship, recruitment, STEM teachers, secondary teachers

Background

Concerns of Certified STEM Teacher Shortage

In the Report for Congress (Kuenzi, 2008), it states that concerns are rising in the United States that a vast majority of secondary school students fail to achieve mathematics and science proficiency; teachers who lack adequate subject matter knowledge teach many of them. In 2015-2016 international assessment of 15-year-old students, when compared to 70 other countries, U.S. ranked 39th in math literacy and 25th in science literacy (Factsmap, 2018). Ingersoll and Perda (2009) asserted that the concern over shortages of mathematics and science teachers have reached new heights. Various high-profile reports from national organizations have directly tied mathematics and science teacher shortages to the quality of academic performances of students and, in turn, to the future well-being of the U.S. economy and the security of the nation. Therefore, the inability of schools to adequately staff classrooms with qualified teachers has emerged as a major educational problem and has been the focus of numerous educational reforms and policy initiatives.

Over recent years, the United States has been investing a lot of resources in increasing the number of qualified STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) teachers in elementary and secondary schools (Ticknor, Gober, Howard, Shaw, & Mathis, 2017). The White House Office of the Press Secretary (2011) announced the goal of adding 100,000 new mathematics and science teachers by 2021. Nevertheless, the Education Commission of the States reported that staffing challenges have failed to improve. The report continued to state that many colleges overproduce teacher candidates with expertise in already-staffed subjects, such as elementary education, but under-producing candidates with expertise in STEM (Aragon, 2016).

National Science Foundation (NSF) Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program

The Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program**,** first authorized under the National Science Foundation Authorization Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-368) and reauthorized in 2007 under the America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science (COMPETES) Act (P.L. 110-69) and the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010 is established to respond to the critical K-12 STEM teacher shortages in the United States. The program encourages talented STEM majors and professionals to pursue teaching careers in elementary and secondary schools (American Association for the Advancement of Science [AAAS], 2019).

[1] Department of Teacher & Bilingual Education, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, USA, E-mail: monica.ratcliff@tamuk.edu
[2] Department of Educational Leadership & Counseling, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, USA

The Noyce program seeks to increase the number of K-12 teachers with strong STEM content knowledge who teach in high-need school districts (AAAS, 2019). The program provides funding to higher education institutions to offer scholarships, stipends, and programmatic support to attract and prepare STEM majors and professionals to become certified K-12 teachers. The new teachers will receive stipends and professional support during their first years of teaching.

Based on the aggregated data from all Noyce programs, findings indicated that the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program was effective in attracting STEM undergraduate students and professionals into teaching (Braam, Bowe, Madsen, & Kirchhoff, 2010; Liou, & Lawrenz, 2011). According to AAAS, there are about 3,700 STEM teachers who were supported by the Noyce program and are now teaching in high-need schools (Bradley, 2014).

Purpose of the Article

National Science Foundation Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program provides funding support to higher education institutions for summer internship program as one of their recruitment strategies (National Science Foundation [NSF], 2017). The primary goal is to introduce freshman and sophomore STEM students early experiences in STEM education to increase the number of prospective students with strong STEM backgrounds to enter K-12 teaching career. Such experiences may be in the forms of summer STEM camps, summer school, STEM museums, or research laboratories (NSF, 2017). The purpose of this article is to discuss the endeavor of a medium-sized Hispanic serving institution in South Texas in recruiting and preparing future STEM teachers through the Noyce Summer Internship Program.

Relevant Literature Review of Noyce Summer Internship Programs

Impact of Pre-Scholarship Internship on Science Majors

Schuster (2013) investigated the impact of Noyce Summer Internship on two cohorts of summer interns (n = 15) on their decisions to pursue teacher certification in a STEM field in Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. A two-part questionnaire was administered to both cohorts three times: immediately before the internship began, immediately after the internships ended, and 3 months after the completion of the internships. The results showed that there were no significant differences between the post-test and follow-up test items. The findings indicated that the interns' desire to become a STEM teacher remained the same or decreased as a result of the internship program.

Nevertheless, Schuster (2013) stated that given the low numbers of undergraduate STEM majors in the Robert Noyce Teach Science Scholarship over the years, the internship program was considered as a recruitment mechanism. It was believed that the internships had a positive impact on awareness of the scholarship opportunity and pursuit of a STEM teaching certification. The pre-scholarship, early field experiences provided the students with an opportunity to develop a more realistic understanding about becoming a secondary teacher. Thus, these internship programs could help qualified STEM students to determine whether or when they should become a Noyce Scholar.

Science Education Summer Internships

In another study, Borgerding (2015) used a qualitative approach to investigate how a summer internship experience influenced interns' future career decisions and ideas about teaching and learning. The sample consisted of five Noyce Interns who participated in the Noyce Science Education Summer Service-Learning Program. Data were drawn from five sources: pre-internship selection interview, application documents, daily reflections, author's feedback on reflections, and post-internship interview.

The results showed that some interns substantially increased their interest in teaching careers, while other interns' interest remains the same (Borgerding, 2013). The interns found that teaching was rewarding. The internship provided them with close connections with students and valued their individuality. Borgerding (2013) concluded that her study highlighted how summer internships for early STEM majors could begin to influence their interest in teaching career. The findings from the study could be used to inform future recruitment efforts.

Impact of Noyce Internship Program on STEM Teacher Recruitment

Morrell and Salomone (2017) conducted a study to examine the first 3 years of the University of Portland Noyce Program to determine the effectiveness of the program in attracting STEM majors to the teaching profession. One of the program components was the summer internships. The summer interns were freshman or sophomore STEM majors. They worked for 8 weeks as tutors and teaching assistants in grades 2-12 STEM classes hosted by a local non-profit organization. The interns received a stipend and on-campus housing for their summer employment.

Over the 3-year period, the University of Portland recruited 24 student interns (Morrell & Salomone, 2017). The interns were asked to respond to, "Why interns apply for the summer program, how they feel they benefitted from their participation, and whether the summer internship swayed any to consider teaching as a career possibility" (Morrell & Salomone, 2017, p. 17). They were surveyed both prior to and following their summer experience. They also participated in focus group interviews at the end of their internship.

In response to why they applied to the internship, most of the participants claimed that they enjoyed working with students. They were influenced by a passionate teacher, and they wanted to explore the possibility of a teaching career. The findings indicated that the internship was successful in introducing the teaching profession to the interns.

Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK) Noyce Program

Consistent with the national problems of retaining qualified teachers, high school mathematics and science are the teaching areas that have persisted among the most critical shortage facing Texas. Given the demographic trends within the state, unless and until teacher supply and related retention issues are satisfactorily addressed, Texas will continue to experience long-term shortages of highly qualified math and science teachers within its high schools (Sid W. Richardson Foundation Forum, 2012).

To alleviate the shortage of STEM teachers, in the spring semester of 2014, the faculty members of Colleges of Arts & Sciences, Education, and Engineering of Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK) collaborated and submitted a proposal to the National Science Foundation Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program. The proposal was accepted. TAMUK was awarded with $1.2 million for 5 years (award #1439861), starting from October 2014 to September 2019. The project title was Future STEM Teachers in South Texas [F(ST)^2]. The main focus of the grant project was to encourage talented STEM majors (biology, chemistry, engineering, computer science, geosciences) from TAMUK and the partner community colleges to become highly qualified secondary STEM teachers.

TAMUK Robert Noyce Summer Internship Program

TAMUK organized 4 years of the internship component from 2015 to 2018 to help recruit Noyce Scholars. The internship was a 4-week paid program. The main purpose of the internship was to provide college STEM majors, who had an interest in teaching, with an opportunity to observe and participate in STEM education. The interns received a stipend of $2,000 and free room-and-board on the campus for the month of June. Over the course of four years, 16 interns (11 males and 5 females) were admitted into the internship program, see Table 1. Three of them (2 males and 1 female) were returning interns. These interns were all undergraduate STEM majors from TAMUK, except one who was a physics major from a partner community college.

Table 1: Demographics of TAMUK Noyce Summer Interns

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Age				
19-21	3	1	3	2
22-24	1	1	1	1
25-27	0	1	2	0
Gender				
Male	2	2	4	3
Female	2	1	2	0
Race/Ethnicity				
White	1		2	
Hispanic	2	3	4	2
Hispanic/Black	1			
Asian				1
Undergrad Status				
Sophomore	2	1	1	1
Junior	2	2	2	1
Senior			3	1
Major				
Biological Sciences	1		2	
Chemistry		1	1	
Mathematics	2		2	1
Physics			1	
Engineering	1	2		2

Preparation for Noyce Summer Internship

The first author of this article was one of the Co-PIs of the TAMUK Noyce program and a faculty member of the College of Education. She was the coordinator and the supervisor of the Noyce Summer Internship Program. She started to contact the Office of Student Access and Special Programs of the university in the fall semester of 2014. The Summer Components of TAMUK Special Programs included Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math & Science, and Upward Bound Urban. There were around 100 high-school students from the nearby school districts participating in the programs every summer. They stayed in the dormitory on the TAMUK campus for 5 weeks. The daily schedule included attending STEM classes and laboratory, recreation, and a field trip.

The TAMUK Office of Student Access and Special Programs agreed to place the interns into their programs as Teaching Assistants. They shadowed their mentor teacher(s) and learned from them through observation and participating in lesson planning and preparation. When the high-school students were attending their classes, the interns were there assisting the mentor teacher as well as the students.

Recruitment& Selection of Interns

In the early spring semester, the coordinator contacted the Office of Marketing and Communications to help create the poster and flyer. The recruitment effort started with posting the information flyers around the campus. Community colleges who were the partners of the Noyce grant project were notified to help recruit STEM majors. The TAMUK Noyce Program Co-PIs in the Colleges of Engineering (engineering and computer science) and Arts and Sciences (biology, chemistry, geosciences, and mathematics) announced the internship in their classes. The internship applicants completed an online application. They were asked to provide two references and typed a 250-word essay about their career goals. The PI and the coordinator of the summer internship program screened the applications. References were contacted and asked to complete a recommendation form. The PI and the coordinator arranged the interview sessions with the finalists. Sometimes, the directors of the TAMUK special programs were invited to serve on the interview panels depending on their availability.

STEM-Teaching Boot Camp

Before they began their internship, the Noyce Interns were required to attend the STEM-Teaching Boot Camp. The coordinator of the Summer Internship Program was also the instructor of the boot camp. It was a two-and-a-half-day training on teaching as a profession. On the first day of the boot camp, the interns took a pre-test. It was focused on the materials, which would be covered in the training. The boot camp instructor utilized the Course Site to create an online Blackboard course site. The interns could access the course content, which included PowerPoint presentations and websites about STEM education and the Texas Administrative Code and Educators' Code of Ethics. The interns were introduced to some teaching strategies for STEM instruction and tutoring skills. Moreover, each intern delivered a presentation on STEM instruction to diverse students, particularly English Language Learners (ELLs), and how to engage girls in STEM. On the last day of the boot camp, the instructor evaluated the interns on their knowledge of teaching as a profession, the development of math and science learning activities, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They took the post-test and needed to make at least 80% in order to embark on the internship. Each year, the interns successfully passed the post-test and moved onto their internship.

Internship Observation and Evaluation

The coordinator of the Summer Internship Program worked closely with the directors of the Special Programs for the placements of the interns. Throughout the years, depending on the STEM majors of the interns, they were assigned to the computer and chemistry laboratories and various STEM classrooms, including those that taught college dual credit mathematics, advanced mathematics, geometry, pre-algebra, and pre-calculus. The interns shadowed and assisted their mentor teachers, who were certified teachers and/or graduate STEM students at the university. In addition, the interns were assigned to tutor the high-school students after the class meetings. Each week the interns were required to turn in their reflections to the PI and the coordinator/supervisor. The interns reflected upon their internship by responding to the pre-designed reflection questions.

The internship coordinator/supervisor conducted regular classroom visits to observe the interns in the classrooms and laboratories. She met with each intern to discuss the observations. Suggestions for improvement were written in the Internship Visitation Record (see Appendix A). The mentor teachers completed a weekly Internship Evaluation (see Appendix B) on each intern. The evaluation consisted of a 5-point rating scale, 1 for Unacceptable and 5 for Exceptional. The teachers rated their interns on essential components of internship experience, which included attitude about teaching, self-motivation, assistance with group instruction, and demonstration of professional behavior. Each intern attended the weekly mentor-mentee conference with their assigned teacher to review the evaluation and seek improvement in STEM education.

On the last day of the internship, the internship coordinator/supervisor completed the same Internship Evaluation Form (see Appendix B) for final evaluation. She met with each intern individually to collect feedback and suggestions for program improvement.

Surveys on Noyce Summer Internship Program

The second author of this article was the evaluator of the TAMUK Noyce Program. To measure the effectiveness of the Noyce Summer Internship Program, several questionnaires were posted online. They were administered to the Noyce Interns three times: before the STEM-Teaching Boot Camp, immediately after the Boot Camp, and immediately after the internships concluded.

Pre-Boot Camp Survey. On the first day of the STEM-Teaching Boot Camp, before the beginning of the training, the instructor informed the interns to complete the online Pre-Boot Camp Survey. The interns were asked to provide their demographic information and to select their responses to what attracted them to the Boot Camp. Table 2 displays the responses of the interns. The most common selected answer was "Explore the possibility of a career in teaching in the STEM field". Some of the more common answers were: "Help school-aged children learn about STEM", "Have hands-on experience to reinforce what I am learning in class", and "Apply my STEM knowledge in real world settings"

Table 2: *What Attracted the Interns to the STEM-Teaching Boot Camp?*

Attraction	# selected			
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Gain exposure in the field of education	1	1	3	1
Explore the possibility of a career in teaching in the STEM field	2	3	4	1
Help school-age children learn about STEM		2	5	2
Become more active in the STEM community		1	2	
Have hands-on experience to reinforce what I am learning in class		5	5	2
Apply my STEM knowledge in real world settings	1	2	5	1
Gain confidence in my potential to be a K-12 teacher		1	4	1

Post-Boot Camp Survey. Immediately after the STEM-Teaching Boot Camp, the interns were asked to respond to the online Post-Boot Camp Survey. The interns were asked to give their satisfaction rating using a Likert scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest. Table 3 displays the interns' satisfaction rates. They showed high satisfaction with the Boot Camp activities (9.38 out of 10). Their overall satisfaction rate toward the STEM-Teaching Boot Camp was 9.43 out of 10.

Table 3: Post Boot Camp Survey

	Mean			
Question	2015	2016	2017	2018
Overall, how satisfied were you with the STEM-Teaching Boot Camp activities?	9.00	10.00	9.00	9.50
Overall, how satisfied were you with the instructors?	9.00	10.00	9.40	10.0
Overall, how satisfied were you with the group of fellow students who participated?	9.67	10.00	9.60	8.50
Overall, how satisfied were you with the STEM-Teaching Boot Camp?	9.00	10.00	9.20	9.50

Post-Internship Program Survey. The Post-Internship Program Survey was administered at the conclusion of the summer internship program. The majority of the interns (9 out of 16) stated that they first became interested in teaching in a STEM area before they learned about the internship program (see Table 4). Also, as shown in Table 5, most of the interns responded that their interest in teaching in the STEM area increased because of the internship. Overall, the interns were highly satisfied with the Noyce Summer Internship Program (8.63 out of 10) (see Table 6).

Table 4: When did the Interns first become interested in teaching in a STEM area?

Statement	2015	2016	2017	2018
I have been interested since childhood.	1	0	2	0
I was interested before I learned about the Noyce Internship program.	3	1	2	3
I have become interested since I learned about the Noyce Internship Program.	0	2	2	0
I am not interested in STEM teaching.	0	0	0	0

Table 5: Was your interest in teaching in the STEM area influenced by the Noyce Summer Internship Program?

Statement	2015	2016	2017	2018
My interest in teaching in the STEM area increased.	2	3	6	2
My interest in teaching in the STEM area decreased.	2	0	0	0
My interest in teaching in the STEM area stayed the same.	0	0	0	1

Table 6: Noyce Summer Internship Program Survey

Question	Mean			
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Overall, how satisfied were you with the Noyce Summer Internship activities?	7.25	9.67	8.33	8.33
Overall, how satisfied were you with the mentors?	9.25	9.67	9.17	8.67
Overall, how satisfied are you with the Noyce Summer Internship Program?	7.50	10.00	9.00	8.00

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to discuss the endeavor of a medium-sized Hispanic serving institution in South Texas in recruiting and preparing future STEM teachers through the Noyce Summer Internship Program. The TAMUK Noyce Summer Internship Program was aligned with previous literature. The program engaged interns with authentic high school teaching environments where they interacted with secondary students (Luft, Wong, & Semken, 2011; Worsham, Friedrichsen, Soucie, Barnett, & Akiba, 2014). The learning experience required regular reflections from the interns (Luft et al., 2011; Worsham et al., 2014). In addition, the program offered teacher education advisory support (Artzt& Curcio, 2008; Worsham et al., 2014). The selection of the interns was based on their primary interests in considering a STEM teaching career and helping young children in learning STEM (Luft, Fletcher, & Fortney, 2005; Morrell & Salomone, 2017). Hence, the Summer Internship Program "seemed well-poised to serve as an effective science/math teacher recruitment" (Borgerding, 2015, p. 265).

The findings from the surveys indicated that the TAMUK Noyce Summer Internship Program made a positive impact on interns. Their interest in teaching in the STEM area increased because of the Noyce Summer Internship Program. Such finding coincides with Borgerding's study (2015). Between 2015 and 2018, the TAMUK NSF Robert Noyce Summer Internship Program had become the interns' training ground for STEM education. The survey results showed that the interns were satisfied with both the STEM Teaching Boot Camp and the Noyce Summer Internship Program. Because of the positive experiences, a majority of STEM majors or Noyce Interns decided to pursue teaching certificates to become high school STEM teachers. They then applied for the scholarship from the Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program, which provided $15,000 per year to support their academic pursuits.

As in Fall 2018, there were eight Noyce Scholars admitted in the Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program. Among these scholars, six of them were recruited from the Noyce Summer Internship Program. Three of them were graduated in December 2018 and have started teaching in high-need schools. The success of the internship program helped to draw STEM majors into the teaching profession.

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Appendix A

NSF Noyce Summer Internship Program
Internship Supervisor's Visitation Record

Noyce Intern's Name:
_____

Internship Site & Program:
_____

Mentor Teacher:
_____

Date: _____ **Time: Start** _____ **Finish** _____
_____

Observations and Suggestions:

_____ _____

Signature (Noyce Intern) Signature (Internship Supervisor)

Appendix B

NSF Noyce Summer Internship Program
Internship Evaluation

Noyce Intern's Name (Print): _____
Internship Site & Program: _____ Date: _____
Mentor Teacher: _____
Internship Supervisor (Print): _____

This evaluation is to be completed by the Mentor Teacher and the Internship Supervisor every week. There is a required weekly teacher-intern meeting to review the evaluation and seek for improvement.

Rating Scale:
5 – Exceptional – Creative, shows initiative, self-motivated, independent worker, needs little supervision, superior communication skills, and outstanding knowledge of subject matter
4 – Above Average – Shows initiative, self-motivated, needs little supervision, good knowledge of subject matter, good communication skills
3 – Average – Shows some initiative, needs supervision, adequate knowledge of subject matter

2- Below Average – Little initiative, needs much supervision, weak subject matter knowledge, and poor communication skills
1 – Unacceptable – If it is necessary to use this designation on any item, please contact the Internship Supervisor

Please rate the intern using the above rating scale:

_____ Has a positive attitude
_____ Follows the policies and procedures of the summer program
_____ Communicates effectively with the Mentor Teacher/Internship Supervisor(s)
_____ Presents a professional appearance and demeanor
_____ Demonstrates developing content knowledge
_____ Self-motivation
_____ Assists with group instruction/individual students
_____ Stays actively involved in the classroom at all times without having to be told
_____ Displays patience, tact, and humor in dealing with students
_____ Demonstrates professional behavior during interactions with others

Attendance Information:
Number of excused absences _____ Number of unexcused absences _____
Number of times tardy/left early _____
If more than once absences – please inform the Internship Supervisor at XXX-XXX-XXXX

Interns Signature: _____ Date: _____

Mentor Teacher and/or Internship Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: _____