



JMU Adult Degree Program

Placement Description

Outreach & Engagement is seeking a junior or senior student majoring in psychology to intern for the Adult Degree Program (ADP). This position will work 10 hours each week with the Director & Academic Unit Head of the Bachelor of Individualized Studies/Adult Degree Program in the Ice House at 127 W. Bruce Street. The schedule will be determined by the applicant's availability.

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

1. Learn about the role and responsibilities of academic programming for non-traditional students in higher education.
2. Assist the Student Success Coordinator with creating a model of best practices for academic advising and student retention.
3. Create program plans of study for each track as an example for students to follow.
4. Assist the Director & Academic Unit Head with redesigning the pre-requisite orientation module for online delivery through Canvas.
5. Assist students with creating an individual plan for success and development of an academic program plan.
6. Provide educational support and skill development to assist students in becoming independent and intentional learners.
7. Initiate academic intervention for students in academic difficulty or students identified as at-risk.
8. Assist the Student Success Coordinator with student records.
9. Compile student demographic and enrollment data reports.

Qualifications

- 10 hours of availability throughout the week, hours flexible



- Willingness to learn, comfortable with ambiguity, and excited about the possibility of being creative
- Strong initiative and work ethic with attention to detail and accuracy
- Ability to work independently as well as on a small team
- Desire to work on meaningful projects
- Knowledge of Microsoft applications and Canvas

Conditions of Internship

Students must be degree-seeking students in Psychology enrolled on at least a half-time basis (6 credits for undergraduate and 5 credits for graduate).

Contact Information

- Contact Person: Virginia Trovato
- Address: 127 W. Bruce St., Harrisonburg, VA 22807
- Telephone: 540/568-4253
- E-Mail: outreach@jmu.edu
- Website: <http://www.jmu.edu/outreach/programs/all/adultdegree/index.shtml>

Read about students' experiences at this site below:

Spring 2024 – Lynn Vassar

For the Spring 2024 semester, I was the intern at the JMU Adult Degree Program (ADP). ADP is one of several programs within the School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE). SPCE provides “Learning for a Lifetime,” with values of impact, integrity, imagine, inspire, access, trust, advocate, and collaborate. There are 4 programs within SPCE: Lifelong Learning Institute, which provides social and intellectual enrichment to adults age 50 and older through non-credit opportunities; Youth Programs, K-12 educational opportunities including summer camps; Professional Development, non-credit certification programs; and ADP, a flexible program for students typically over the age of 25 working towards their Bachelor’s degree.

ADP’s mission is as follows: “The Adult Degree Program/Bachelor of Individualized Study delivers a flexible, dynamic, and rigorous degree completion curriculum to meet the



individual education and career goals of our students. ADP/BIS's non-residential program offers a framework for students with significant transfer credit and/or prior learning experience to design their own academic plan." Essentially, ADP offers a chance for non-traditional students to earn their degree with as few barriers as possible. There is no typical story for an ADP student, but many were previous college students that never earned their degree, have extensive life experience that can't always be translated to the classroom, have full-time jobs, and need their degree to progress in their field. For these reasons, ADP works with every student to make their degree as easy to earn as possible. All ADP classes are fully online, with a majority being asynchronous. Classes are offered in the Fall, Spring, and Summer. A typical load would be 9 credits a semester, though students may take more or less depending on their circumstances. CLEP tests or other methods of gaining course credit for life experiences, such as creating portfolios analogous to a course syllabus, are offered and highly encouraged.

ADP is a very relaxed work environment. There are 4 staff members within our unit: Virginia, one of the academic advisors and the supervisor to the ADP intern; Heather, the other academic advisor specifically for the teaching licensure students; Haley, the program coordinator; and Daniel, the director. The ADP intern will also frequently interact with Darin, the enrollment specialist for students applying to ADP, and Sarah, the Associate Dean in SCPE. Most of the interaction with this staff will be at the weekly ADP staff meeting. As the intern, you are welcome to contribute as little or as much as you feel comfortable with. Many staff meetings cover topics that as an intern you wouldn't have knowledge of, such as coordinating faculty for the next semester's classes. At these staff meetings I would just observe and learn the process. However, there have been times I have brought my own agenda items either related to my contribution project or other task updates. Contribution in this space is whatever you're most comfortable with and will likely increase throughout the semester as you learn more about ADP. Apart from the weekly staff meeting and 1:1 meeting with Virginia, your experience as the ADP intern will be whatever you make of it. My duties and tasks have included: researching multigenerational scholarships; posting on InScribe/ADP Lounge, the virtual community for ADP students; creating labels by using mail merge; collecting information on veterans in the ADP program through historical records; meeting with the Open Education Librarian about no-cost/low-cost textbook options for ADP faculty; observing advising sessions; and working on my contribution project. No week has looked exactly the same for me, and I have at times needed to seek out duties for the week. This is one of the greatest benefits and greatest challenges as the ADP intern: flexibility and self-motivation. Virginia places a large amount of trust in the ADP intern to take tasks on for themselves relating to their interests, strengths, and capacity. This was something I had to adapt to, since I was more used to having set weekly duties in past positions. Yet, it is also something I value the most about this placement. I've been able to make this internship my own and not only contribute to the program, but also gain skills in ways that I uniquely desired.

If you are interested in this placement, be prepared to answer the question, "What do you want to do?" This applies for your various tasks as discussed above, but also for your contribution project, professional development opportunities, and work style. My contribution project entirely stemmed from my previous experience in virtual tours. I was given the option of having remote hours, though I preferred to be in person as much as possible. Virginia and the ADP team will



work with you to ensure whatever goals you have set for this internship will be met in whatever way works best for you.

My contribution project was focused on creating resource videos to post on InScribe to improve a sense of belonging in ADP students. Implementation of this project involved researching resources to highlight, coordinating with partner departments and offices, utilizing Outlook Calendar to schedule meetings, using Zoom to record and caption interviews, using Canva to edit videos, posting videos to YouTube and using YouTube's built-in caption editor, and embedding the videos in an InScribe post. Many of these platforms I had basic experience with prior to this project, but I have now used them in ways I hadn't before. Learning how to make asynchronous content is extremely helpful for creating accessibility in any field. As I am pursuing a career in Higher Education, learning to coordinate not just with internal staff members but external offices has been crucial for me. In teaching ADP students about these resources, I also learned more about what different offices in Higher Education have to offer and how partnerships like these could be utilized in future positions.

One of my struggles with this site was applying my psychology coursework, though that is not a fault of the site and more a fault of what I really wanted to get out of my internship. There are ways that psychology can certainly be applied to the ADP, such as Psychology of Adulthood in working with adult students, counselling techniques that can be helpful in advising sessions, or Social Psychology for understanding how students and staff members interact and behave. The greatest way my psychology coursework prepared me for this internship was by providing literature review skills necessary for the contribution project or other ongoing research for ADP.

If you are looking for client interaction, this is not the placement for you. Apart from observing advising appointments, an internship with ADP is primarily a desk job. I appreciated this aspect of the placement, as so many of my past experiences were more student/client facing. Having the ability to focus on the more administrative aspects of a job may not seem the most interesting, but it is an important experience to have prior to entering the workforce. This is also a placement that will require you to be detail oriented, organized, open to new experiences, and welcoming. Overall, I would highly recommend this site to anyone wanting an independent and flexible field placement experience.

Fall 2023 - Olivia Brightbill

The James Madison University (JMU) Adult Degree Program (ADP) is a part of the School of Professional & Continuing Education (SPCE) department and is a primarily online undergraduate degree program for adult learners. The typical ADP student is 22 years old or older and has full-time responsibilities whether it be a job and/or a family. Students applied to ADP are pursuing a Bachelor of Individualized Study (BIS) which allows for personalization of the student's degree for their pursued education track and incorporates their prior learning for credit. Prior credit and experiential learning are a prevalent part of ADP that follows their overarching pursuit of accessibility and adaptability. Students could receive credits from their previously taken courses and/or from experiential credits. This can include credits from military service or professional experiences like owning your own business. ADP is made for the 'non-traditional'



student and so these life experiences are not only expected but incorporated and accommodated for. ADP operates like other majors you can take at JMU with academic advisors, an academic unit head, and some required courses. However, it differs from other majors in that although you can take some courses on campus, it is primarily online, the degree can be completed in around 2 years, and there are no designated instructional faculty. There are no dedicated professors under ADP, and they are instead typically professors from other departments. This means the actual number of staff for ADP is relatively smaller, but the number of students enrolled to the program are also relatively smaller. In terms of the semester structure most courses are taken in half semesters and there are Fall 1, Fall 2, Spring 1, Spring 2, and Summer sections offered.

The office itself is located in the JMU Ice House with the School of Professional & Continuing Education. The field placement site supervisor for ADP has been Virginia Trovato and works with the program as an academic advisor, but also takes on a lot of other initiatives and responsibilities within the program. As an intern I was able to consistently keep in contact with Virginia Trovato to work out the scheduling for hours at the site and answer any questions that I had. I was given a desk and desktop computer in an office space to work at when I came into the site, but I was also allowed to work from home when necessary and it still counted towards my site hours. I did not have a strict schedule for coming into the office and would communicate with my site supervisor to work around what my schedule looked like that particular week. There are certain events and meetings that are held on a strictly scheduled or held on a regular basis that interns are encouraged to attend. I found attending the weekly team meetings helpful for integrating myself as an intern with the team, learning what ADP does, and attending is important to keep up to date with current events of the program. The team meetings are also a great opportunity to present potential internship projects, share your findings, and propose initiatives.

The environment of the office is professional, but incredibly friendly. I enjoyed working with and getting to know all the staff. Working with Virginia Trovato as my site supervisor was also a great opportunity and advantage to the internship. I had weekly individual meetings with Virginia Trovato to touch base and plan out tasks for that week. I found my site supervisor amenable to meeting or speaking with me directly during my internship, whether it was in-person or online. I felt comfortable in expressing my opinion or any concerns I had. During the internship I found I had a lot of autonomy and creative control over my projects and responsibilities at the site. At the beginning of my internship, I found this challenging as I was expecting routine tasks and assignments, but as it went on, I found this to be a great advantage for professional experience and personal growth. Showing initiative and being responsible for my own assignment details were valuable skills gained. In the first few weeks I did not know what direction to go with my contribution project or initially how to relate the time I would be spending at ADP to psychology. By getting to decide my own projects with the site I was also able to get comfortable in knowing my strengths and interests professionally and in psychology. Vocationally, I am inclined towards human services and mental health work; I approached the psychology side of things from the academic advising angle and how to provide and serve accessible resources to non-traditional students. I would recommend this site both to those that are used to working independently and those that are not used to working independently as it is a valuable learning opportunity.

I worked on many projects and had a variety of opportunities to pursue during my internship with ADP. In terms of interacting with students, there are typically not students coming



in-person to the office to interact with the staff, so most interactions are regulated to online communication. But there were plenty of opportunities to sit in on academic advising sessions with my site supervisor and sometimes scheduled events for student engagement. There is also a platform, InScribe, that I used many times to interact and communicate with students directly. Additionally, I was also able to go to meetings with other departments on campus and act as a liaison for ADP when communicating with them. There were other times when I did have some basic office tasks, but overall, many of the projects were a rewarding process and I was able to create products I would be comfortable showing to potential employers.

My contribution project, like the rest of my internship, turned out to be quite flexible, interconnecting expansive. The project originally focused on students who were identified as 'late-starters' from the semester, and I compared all the dates of their processes; ADP has a rolling acceptance date for applications and the registration process. There is not much we can do in terms of external departments like the registrar's office, but it is good to understand these timelines for internal reference. The flexible timeline is something ADP intends to keep for accessibility purposes for applicants, so the focus is more so on how this might affect student success and figuring out how we can limit the roadblocks students face that we can control. Efforts have been made to figure out what the registration experience has been for students and what resources ADP can provide to help their understanding. There were attempts like a survey, sitting in on advising meetings, and holding focus groups to get the students' perspective and how starting late might affect them, but there was not a lot of feedback to go off on. This project should continue to try to understand what can be changed or added from the students' perspective and try to analyze/track more late-starters from other semesters for the next intern. Many of the supplemental materials I provided for the site were in pursuit of furthering student engagement or providing them accessible resources and the materials should all still accessible for reference.

Fall 2022 – Cisy Fang

JMU's Adult Degree Program (ADP) was created in 1977 as an interdisciplinary program specifically for adult students to complete the Bachelor of Individualized Study (BIS) degree. ADP is now a primarily online program that allows students to create a personalized interdisciplinary concentration or focus of study, usually using several course tracks in education and business-related fields. Our program is housed in the School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE). JMU ADP's mission is to "address the unique needs of adult learners through an innovative, personalized program of study that meets their education and career goals." Every student at JMU ADP can create their curriculum based on their personal interests. For example, if a student wants to do human resources and small business in the future, they can make a curriculum that includes HR management and business courses. Once the student finishes drafting, the academic advisor would take a look and decide if the curriculum is reasonable.



What I have done in the past semester:

10. Syllabus Update

My first task at ADP was to update the summer syllabi. I received a list of the professors' email addresses and was asked to write emails requesting their summer syllabi. I realized I misspelled one of the professor's last names when she wrote an email back; this was the first lesson I learned from this internship, how important it is to pay close attention to details.

11. Attended VALOR Event

During my first work day, I went with Virginia to attend the VALOR event near the JMU Health Center. On our way to the event, Virginia introduced me to why we were going there. Student veterans are JMU ADP's target student body, so it would be nice if we could attend an event with many student veterans present. Virginia quickly started conversations with the volunteers and introduced JMU ADP to them. Even though we did not get the chance to have a lot of discussions with the student veterans, going there is still beneficial. I also learned that having small talk and being brave in approaching strangers are essential social skills.

12. FERPA Training

I received FERPA training during my first workday. FERPA training is directly related to students' privacy. The students' personal information, including their addresses, phone numbers, and grades, is protected. Whenever I join a student appointment session, Virginia will ask the student if they have any issue with her sharing their transcript.

13. ADP Lounge Proposal

This is another big project I worked on at the beginning of this semester. I created a PowerPoint presentation with all the weekly plans I came up with and presented them in front of the team during our Tuesday meeting. In my original plan, I would post about national days and ask questions for them to answer. I did not strictly follow the plan, but it can be a good reminder. To be more efficient, I would suggest the new intern create a more thorough and developed plan ahead of time.

14. ADP Lounge Posts

I have posted on ADP Lounge almost every week, and I am happy to see more student responses. Our students do not have the "normal" learning experience, and the biggest challenge for ADP is to create a welcoming community that increases the students' belongingness. My role is to be a friend, peer, and student with similar struggles. When I post content on ADP Lounge, I want to be as genuine as possible.

15. ADP Data Sheet

One of my biggest accomplishments is the datasheet design. It was the first time I used my Adobe skills to do design work for ADP. Based on Virginia's information, I created charts to make the information more vivid and comprehensive. Even though this data sheet is currently for



internal use, I asked myself to keep a high standard and make this visually appealing in case the ADP team wants to show this data sheet service-learning all JMU branded colors and fonts to match the university standard. I added the PNG logo to make this look more official and formal.

16. Adobe Illustrator Instruction

I put a lot of effort into the datasheet design and would like to make it "reusable". Considering Adobe AI as a new tool, I created an AI instruction file with all the steps to open the file and save file. To make sure the steps were clear, I started a new file and took screenshots step by step to make it easy to understand.

I had a lot of independence at JMU ADP, way more than I expected. It can be an advantage and a disadvantage because too much autonomy confused me at the beginning, not knowing the workload and types of tasks. I was not able to offer much help to the team. I did some basic office work, which was not really related to my major. Being in the office setting is fantastic most of the time, but there were times when I was "lost."

I learned to pay close attention to details. I learned how important it is to communicate with the team members in a timely manner. I learned how to open conversations with different people... These are all practical skills I will need in a few years. Being in an office setting allowed me to observe my team members' working habits. Some people prefer having big team meetings, while others think having 1-1 sessions is more efficient. This internship experience changed my career goals because I realized that being a hard worker is not the only criteria. Having high EQ is also super important. I do not have social skills, so this internship reminds me to perform better in the future.

The research experience from the psychology field helped me the most in this internship. I was asked to search for grants, and I started with a broad search on Google, and when I found some helpful information, I started to search on different websites and finally got a few grants available for JMU ADP.

For my contribution project, I wanted to help ADP embrace DEI more. An inclusive community is the most crucial element, so I created a proposal and posted content in a casual tone weekly. I got the most responses on the Halloween post, and I got the chance to see the students' pets and family pictures. It was amazing to talk with them online. I am so glad that the ADP Lounge is now getting more attention from the students and communicating with peers about specific topics indirectly makes ADP a more diverse and inclusive community.

Spring 2022 – Margaret Lindler

This past semester I had the opportunity to intern for JMU's Adult Degree Program. This program is a fully remote program that allows students to earn either a Bachelor of Science,



Bachelor of Arts, or Bachelor of Individualized study degree. All students will have the base major in Individualized Study and the Adult Degree Program allows students to create their own concentration of study to meet their personalized goals. The Adult Degree Program's mission is to find new and creative ways to meet the needs of adult learners whilst trying to ensure a sense of belonging and connectedness. The Adult Degree Program is a part of the School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE).

As an intern with the Adult Degree Program (ADP), I was supervised by the academic advisor, Virginia Trovato, and was able to do a multitude of tasks to help around the office and students as well. At the midpoint of the semester, I became the point person for their social media platforms. This allowed me to add posts to be created, edit possible posts, and oversee the new student-based website through InScribe called ADP Lounge. Although I was not a part of the launch of ADP Lounge, I got to see the website grow and the new features that were added! I also had the opportunity every other week to sit in on ADP/SPCE team meetings and InScribe meetings and was given the chance to share my thoughts and opinions. At the end of the semester, I was able to sit in on IS 498 Research Presentations and partake as a judge for the symposium. It was a great experience as I got to see what students were working on all semester. I had the opportunity to independently work with the Spring '22 Commencement Speaker. I met with them via zoom a couple of times to ensure that their speech was within the allotted time and peer edited it. Although this was one of the smaller tasks that I participated in, it was the most rewarding. Hearing how ADP impacted their life in such a positive way was wonderful to hear about and validated my positive feelings towards what ADP does and continues to strive to do. With the way that this internship is set up, you have the chance to be very independent and you can make what you want of the experience. There are multiple areas that you can explore, and Virginia was more than happy to work with me to figure out what projects would best fit my interests. Having the freedom to choose was extremely nice because I was able to explore my current interests further and step out of my comfort zone to see what else interested me. Since I was allowed to be independent, I feel that I learned more than I would have if she hovered or helped every single step of the way.

Throughout the semester I was able to learn a great deal about how higher education works and I learned more about myself. During my time there, the program was going through a tremendous number of changes as they did not have a permanent Director, Program Coordinator, and was understaffed overall. Due to these circumstances, I was able to see how the hiring process works in higher education. I learned more than I expected as I was not expecting the hiring process to be as long. The hiring process for a new Director can take over a year. The Adult Degree Program is still currently going through this process! I was able to sit in on a couple of the group-style interviews which was nice to experience. From this internship, I also learned a lot about myself. I learned that I love interacting with people and creating relationships with those



that I can help. This experience also validated my feelings that I interact with strangers well. In the beginning, I was not as confident in myself, but with the positive affirmations from Virginia, I became increasingly more confident in myself and the decisions that I made.

I had a fantastic experience interning at the Adult Degree Program. Despite the challenges caused by understaffing, Virginia was a vastly supportive supervisor and did everything in her power to ensure I was not overwhelmed and received the experience that I wanted. I chose to step up in areas that I could help Virginia since her workload was quickly piling up and because of that, I was able to learn even more. I had the opportunity to write the ADP blurb for the SPCE newsletter and I drafted a couple of letters for students that made the Dean's and President's List, but these were only a few examples. Virginia has great compassion for all the ADP Students, which was amazing to experience. At the beginning of my experience in the Adult Degree Program, I was confident that I wanted to possibly work as a professor in the future. One of the main reasons I had chosen to accept the internship at ADP was that I wanted to see if I liked the advising side of being a professor. Although I gained more knowledge about advising in a higher education setting, I learned a lot more than I expected. Seeing how passionate Virginia was about the students that she advised, made me realize how connected students can be to their advisors. I cannot speak of any weaknesses in interning in the Adult Degree Program. Every faculty member, including those I had few interactions with, was always extremely welcoming, understanding, and sweet! I would recommend interning at ADP to anyone, even if they are unsure of what they would like to do post undergraduate!

In summary, this was a very positive experience for me as a student and on a personal level as well. I was able to explore multiple areas regarding higher education, learned a lot about myself, and figured out a new career I could see myself pursuing. I am appreciative of my experience in the Adult Degree Program. Having the freedom and independence that I spoke of earlier makes this a unique internship in my opinion and could be a beneficial experience for anyone.

Spring 2022 – Macy Gray

The Adult Degree Program at James Madison University provides adult learners the opportunity to finish their bachelor's degree in a flexible format. This format offers classes that are offered online asynchronously. This internship offers students the opportunity to sit in on advising appointments with the academic advisor of the Adult Degree Program (ADP), Virginia Trovato. As an intern, I had the opportunity to observe the advising process, create and distribute a survey, and work on important documents. I also got to observe meetings with the partners of ADP, Education Dynamics and Inscribe. Education Dynamics provided additional resources to students in the program. Inscribe is an online forum where students can post and answer



questions, as well as connect with each other. I was able to observe how partnerships within higher education work. Representatives from Education Dynamics and Inscribe were very kind and always open to feedback. During advising meetings, my supervisor gave me the opportunity to ask questions and engage with the students in the program. Editing important documents involved a manual for one of my supervisor's colleagues and making a spreadsheet to organize the information on prerequisites. In addition to the tasks I encountered each week, I was also given special opportunities to observe conferences, as well as a Town Hall with the provost. I even got to observe the hiring process through watching a presentation done by one of the candidates for the open director position. Being in the Ice House, I felt so supported by the rest of the Adult Degree Program team. Everyone was so welcoming to me and my fellow intern. I felt assured that I could ask anyone a question without judgment and could always reach out for help if I needed it. My supervisor was very understanding of my busy schedule as a college student and this flexibility allowed me to easily get my hours in and get a lot out of the experience.

My supervisor gave me the opportunity to cater this internship towards my own interests and career goals. I was appreciative of her giving us this chance and I could tell that it was very important to her that this process would be meaningful for us. My fellow intern chose to do a project on increasing online engagement through Inscribe. I chose to gather and collect data on adult students by designing a survey to be sent out to the students here at JMU. Doing this survey project allowed me to work with the Assistant Dean of the School of Professional and Continuing Education. I assessed the sense of belonging and adult learners and gave students in the program the opportunity to provide feedback on the JMU resources.

When I graduate from James Madison University, I hope to enter the mental health field as a counselor or therapist. Through observing advising appointments, I was able to notice my supervisor's demeanor when students would speak with her regarding sources of stress that affect their educational goals. I admired her ability to always remain courteous and patient with her students and I saw how much she was able to connect with her students. I will definitely take these lessons with me as I hope to create a similar environment between myself and my future clients. I also learned so much about working in higher education. Although I do not see myself entering this field, I was able to explore other career options and apply the skills used in these professions to my future career.

I have been lucky enough to take some enlightening psychology classes here at James Madison University. In my personality class, I learned about motivation, as well as the impacts of having an internal locus of control. An internal locus of control allows an individual to complete their goals with the hopes of personal growth and expanding their knowledge and skills. I feel I was able to have an internal locus of control mindset during my internship. I was not focused on any external rewards, such as payment or receiving a good grade. I also did not crave praise or



affirmation from my supervisor or any other people I worked with at my site. I knew this internship would allow me to learn about helping professions in a hands-on way and that it would offer me a type of learning experience that I had not had in college up until this point. Knowing how meaningful this experience was allowed me to focus on bettering myself as an individual and as a worker, which I knew would be very beneficial to me. Having learned about the importance of having an internal locus of control, I knew I could be more likely to have better physical health and be a higher achiever. These are all traits that are correlated with having a more internal locus of control, as I learned in my personality psychology class. Focusing on my internal motivation allowed me to get more out of my site experience and I was glad I got to learn about this topic before taking Intro Field Work.

Within the psychology major, I will also be completing an Honors Thesis. This semester, I had to select a topic and submit a proposal to the Honors College. When I completed my survey project, I chose to study the concept of sense of belonging in adult students. My supervisor directed me towards the assistant dean, who was able to provide me with a sense of belonging scale and other resources. This helped me with the brainstorming process for my Honors thesis. I realized that I wanted to study a sense of belonging more in-depth as my thesis topic. I was able to use the resources I used for my data collection project in my proposal I submitted to the Honors College. Getting to speak with the assistant dean was very helpful and really helped me start going in the right direction. I am very grateful for having this knowledge as I head into my last two semesters, where I will be collecting and summarizing data to present at the Honors Symposium.

I am grateful for my supervisor, Virginia Trovato, for her support and help throughout the semester. I hope to continue to keep in touch with her past this semester and I feel so lucky to have had such a positive experience for my first internship. For any future ADP interns, I would advise them to make the best of their time at the site and be open to all the different projects you can take on! I know I will miss going into the Ice House and I will miss all the great people there! Thank you to Dr. Szwedo for giving me this opportunity!

Fall 2021 – Samantha Conner

The JMU Adult Degree Program is an online degree completion program that allows nontraditional adult students to complete their postsecondary degree completely online. Through this program, students can choose to complete a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, or Bachelor of Individualized Studies. Every student majors in Individualized Studies in the Adult Degree Program, with the choice to add multiple course tracks. There are eight pre-made tracks that students can select from, or students can choose to create their own course tracks. The Adult



Degree Program also offers the opportunity for students who left JMU before completing their degree to return through the Return to Madison Program. This gives students the chance to return to JMU through the Adult Degree Program to complete their degree virtually. The Adult Degree Program is housed within the School of Professional and Continuing Education. The SPCE's vision is to expand opportunities for individuals both within and outside of Harrisonburg community through education, programming, and experiences for all ages.

While interning at the Adult Degree Program (ADP) under the supervision of Virginia Trovato, the ADP Academic Advisor, I was able to work with students and staff on a number of tasks to make operations run smoothly. Throughout the semester, I was able to create a library of social media posts for the ADP from archived files. I crafted several helpful "how-to" videos for the ADP 101 Canvas page, along with a full length "how-to" for students working on their Program of Study Plan, which will be used in the ADP IS 200 Intro to the Major course. I captioned all videos to increase accessibility, and worked to educate the office on the importance of accessibility through Universal Design (UDL). In order to expand this knowledge to those outside of the administrative ADP staff, I created a menu of UDL/accessibility options for faculty, which will be included in updates emails that will be incrementally sent out over the next two semesters. I implemented a Social Media campaign on Self-Care and the 12 Days of ADP, while also generating a Self-Care assignment backed by research, which is currently in use in IS 200. I was able to assist with invitations and scheduling for the senior IS 498 end of semester research symposium. I contributed to ADP and SPCE staff meetings, and researched project related project management theories to inform academic advising. I helped with newsletter and website updates. I was able to assist with the creation and launch of the ADP Lounge online Inscribe community. I attended a UPSEA conference to gain more knowledge and skills related to academic advising with non-traditional students. I was also given the opportunity to work one-on-one with several students on study skills and habits in the ADP intro course, IS 200, after becoming more familiar with the advising process through sitting in on my supervisor's individualized student meetings.

My field placement site experience was amazing due to the fantastic faculty and staff at the Adult Degree Program. My impression of the site is incredibly positive, with the only negatives coming from the learning curve during the first couple of weeks at the site. As a traditional JMU student, I was never exposed to what this program entailed before my internship. It took a couple of weeks to learn about the SPCE and ADP and fully understand them, but my supervisor and other staff members were patient and welcoming to questions. Staff met individually with me to explain their roles and what they brought to the team, which taught me a lot about the administrative functioning behind most academic program scenes. Due to the nature of the Adult Degree Program, I was able to work on a wide variety of tasks and was given a lot of freedom,



which I highly valued. This gave me the liberty to make real positive change related to my contribution project, which I will discuss later.

While interning at the Adult Degree Program, I learned a great deal about early burnout in nontraditional distance learners. This particular academic program has a problem with “ghosting”, in which students virtually drop off the side of the planet, even though they are still enrolled in the program. To counter this, I worked to create self-care based assignments to provide students with the opportunity to proactively make plans to take care of themselves throughout the semester. This assignment has researched links to provide students with information about how vital self-care is to reducing burnout. Typically, ADP students are working full time jobs or are full time parents, so it can be difficult to find the time to prioritize themselves over their school and work obligations. By providing these assignments and research, I hope to foster more positive attitudes towards self-care. After having this experience, I hope to foster an environment in my future career in which individuals understand how essential taking care of themselves is. This will be a thing that I continue to advocate for and emphasize for the rest of my career.

During this semester, I was also involved in research centered around motivation in higher education. This research highly informed the way that I interacted with students, along with the UDL Menu that I have provided to the ADP faculty. This graphic includes research on motivation that my research advisor has done in the past, because of its relevance to motivation and burnout in the adult students that I had the pleasure of working with.

Throughout my time working at the Adult Degree Program, I saw how passionate the faculty and staff were about increasing access, equity, and inclusion in their academic program. This inspired me to think about how to further increase access to students with learning disabilities and from diverse backgrounds. I wanted to ensure that all students in the Adult Degree Program were given similar opportunities for success upon enrollment in the program. The shift back into higher education can be startling for most non-traditional students, and I wanted to find a way to ease this transition. I decided to implement Universal Design tenets into IS 200, which is the first course every ADP student is required to take. At the end of this course, students create a Program of Study, which acts as a plan for their path to graduation. This plan is signed by their academic advisor, and ensures that their time at the Adult Degree Program runs smoothly. I created accessibility videos and graphics to guide students through this Program of Study, along with providing students with opportunities to become more autonomous over their shift into higher education. Providing multiple forms of representation for academic instructions is a core tenet in Universal Design, and will hopefully ensure students with multiple learning styles and internet access backgrounds the ability to thrive in this program. I also created graphics that will be incrementally sent out in newsletter that will further educate faculty and staff on how to implement Universal Design, and the importance of doing so.



Spring 2021 – Addison Boyer

During the spring semester of 2021, I was able to conduct my field placement at James Madison University's Adult Degree Program (ADP). Throughout my experience, I was able to develop and enhance my professional goals as well as personal goals. My experience at the ADP was positive and beneficial in many regards.

The Adult Degree Program at JMU seeks to provide nontraditional students with the opportunity to experience academic growth through the completion of a Bachelor of Individualized Studies degree. This degree allows students to pick and choose which classes they want to take to create a track that directs them towards degree completion. The Adult Degree Program provides guidelines for students to complete their degrees, but the personalization and direction of those degrees is solely up to the student.

In my role as an intern within the Adult Degree Program, I was able to perform and observe a plethora of duties and functions. I primarily worked behind the scenes being that the position was remote at the time of my placement. Aside from weekly meetings with my supervisor, I participated in duties that included taking notes for meetings, observing marketing discussions, and office-related tasks that could be performed remotely. My favorite activity, though, was observing my supervisor's meetings with potential students, new students, and current students. I really appreciated the aspect of my role that served as an outreach position and provided a sense of connection, especially in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. There were certainly instances where I provided little information, simply because I was not comfortable enough yet, but even when I was observing these meetings with students, I felt it to be very beneficial to connect with students and hear their stories.

My impressions of the Adult Degree Program are positive overall. The entire ADP staff is incredibly welcoming and engaging. During my placement, I was simultaneously applying to graduate programs and the entire team was supportive and took an interest in my life as a student. In my experience, my supervisor gave me creative liberty to essentially make the internship whatever I wanted to be, which I appreciated in the age of virtuality. With that, however, came a lot of, what felt like, busy work. The bulk of my hours during my time with the program came from conducting my own research and while I am grateful to feel more comfortable in that area, it felt hard to engage with the research that I was looking into after a while. Other than that component, I had a positive experience with the program. The students are helpful and engaging, the staff is kind and welcoming, and there is an honest effort from the team to create a positive experience for the interns.

During my time with the Adult Degree Program, I was able to learn more about outreach. I was interested in learning more about this area when I began my field placement at the ADP because



I knew that in my future career, I wanted to be able to work with people who were going through hardships. I found that the meetings that I participated in with students provided me with that sense of outreach because the students were able to advocate for their needs and their desired experiences. On the flip of that, it was also interesting to see the assessment of these outreach meetings from the team themselves. I quickly realized that the ADP team was passionate about creating a safe and inclusive environment for all students and that they responded really well to students who expressed their struggles and shared their experiences. These interactions helped influence my career choices because it allowed me the opportunity to directly engage with people who feel as though they either need to be advocate for themselves or they need someone to be an advocate for them. As I pursue a Master's in Counseling in the fall, I could not be more thankful that the Adult Degree Program was able to provide me with this area of experience. My contribution project is something that I am particularly proud of. I knew going into my placement that I wanted to work in an area of outreach, but I also found throughout my placement that I was also interested in marketing because it carries so many elements and aspect of psychology. I decided to pursue a project that carried elements of marketing and outreach, which was something that proved to be a challenge, but also a benefit for ADP students. After writing my research paper on the relationship between marketing and higher education outreach strategies, I worked with my supervisor to form the Peer Mentoring group. This group involved five ADP students who were contacted by my supervisor based on previously mentioned interests in a program such as the Peer Mentoring group. In the meetings with the students, we worked together to form discussion boards that are displayed in a universal canvas page for all ADP students. The topics of these discussion boards range from textbooks, to schedules, to time management skills. The interactions between students beyond the group was steadily increasing at the end of my time with the ADP and it provided amazing insight to the program as to how they could offer stronger student outreach services.

In conclusion, I feel as though the Adult Degree Program was a great experience for me as a student in field placement. I learned a lot about the professional goals that I have for myself as well as how important the interactions that you have with the people at your site are. I felt as though the Adult Degree Program gave me excellent tools that I will be able to use in my future career and the students shared amazing life experiences that were genuine and sincere and made me appreciate them more than I already did. My experience at the Adult Degree Program was positive overall and I would highly recommend this site to anyone.

Fall 2020 – Anthony Naranjo (Intro to Field Placement)

Completing an internship with the Adult Degree Program this Fall has been an incredible learning experience for me. Student advising has been a field I was curious about ever since



entering college, and I have learned so much from the people at JMU Professional and Continuing Education ever since I started here. At first I was not sure how my previous education in Psychology would be able to lend a hand to the program, but working with Virginia Trovato, Dr. Windi Turner, and many others, gave me confidence to express my abilities. The Adult Degree Program is a program in James Madison's Professional and Continuing Education Department. The main goal of the Adult Degree Program is to help non-traditional students reach their goal of degree completion. As I soon found out, there are many barriers and obstacles in the way of the non-traditional student, and the program was focused on reducing those barriers as much as possible. Being able to sit in on advising sessions and also being able to communicate with some of the students myself, I soon was humbled by how different and much more difficult some students in this program have it compared to my undergraduate experience.

One of my first responsibilities during this experience was to help students feel as though there are resources and people out there who can help, even during a pandemic. I researched numerous academic and mental health programs JMU has to offer, in order to make the students aware and excited to utilize these resources. This was very exciting for me as it was my first chance to make a real contribution to the program. I was hoping it helped make at least a few students' lives easier. I was rewarded almost immediately with gratitude from the few students I had met with during the first few weeks. Most if not all students had not been aware of the resources I had mentioned, and they had seen it as a beacon of hope in what was troubling times for some students.

Another contribution I was able to make to the Adult Degree Program was my final research paper. The paper I wrote focused on retention and diversity initiatives for non-traditional students, but non-white non-traditional students specifically. After doing a multitude of research, I felt as though this population was not receiving enough attention or care. In researching for retention ideas and diversity initiatives, there were some amazing research done on how to increase diversity awareness on campus and also retention strategies that I am hoping JMU can find a way to implement one day. This research was so rewarding for me as it opened my eyes to the true workings of higher education.

Some of the greatest strengths of this program's internship was that I was able to express what I was looking to come out of this experience with. I think this is a huge advantage for students who are looking for experience in a particular practice such as research. I expressed to my supervisors that more experience in research was something that would be awesome for me to have, as I had not done research in a few years, and they quickly found an exciting project for me to tackle. This was great for me and I am truly grateful to have such supportive supervisors to help me during my project.



Another great strength of this program is the people. From my first day to my last, I was made to feel extremely appreciated by everyone. Joining our credit team meetings or meeting with Education Dynamics and feeling as though I had a purpose and I was welcomed to join was a great feeling that many other internship experiences do not provide. I was always asked to express my opinion, even if it was on things I did not have a great deal of knowledge of, I was still explained things and made to feel important. The people at JMU Professional and Continuing Education are extremely talented, knowledgeable, and hard-working, but also down-to-earth and friendly.

This experience has taught me a multitude of things not only about higher education, but also about myself. I had always thought I would love working with people and it would be something I am good at, especially when it comes to helping people. This experience further validated for me as I worked with many different students and other people in the field of higher education. It was extremely rewarding for me to be able to help students in any way I can, especially being able to provide a different perspective as a psychology major. This will be useful for me in my future job in sales, as it mostly requires constant communication with other people in a professional setting.

As far as my internship went, I would not say it had any weaknesses. I think this is a great program for anyone who does have interest in advising or higher education. One thing I would say is that one of my favorite experiences was the CAEL Conference and I think allowing future interns access to information sessions such as these can be really helpful for the student and program as a whole. I learned a lot of new information during those few conferences and it had a great effect on my research. I also think the Adult Degree Program did a great job of keeping the intern engaged as far as allowing him to join meetings via Zoom. I hope in the future interns will be able to come to the ICE House and complete some work in the office as well, as that is when I felt the most engaged.