Developing Fundamental Skills and Knowledge in Preservice Extension Educators: An Internship Approach

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PURPOSE
The purpose of this study was to determine the fundamental skills and knowledge that graduate students gained through their participation in an Extension Education internship program and their perceptions of the best methods for obtaining these skills.

ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study was to determine the fundamental skills and knowledge that graduate students gained through their participation in an Extension Education internship program and their perceptions of the best methods for obtaining these skills. A total of 14 Extension Education interns participated. The data was collected through a series of focus group interviews. A transcript-based analysis was conducted using a phenomenological approach. The study revealed that participants identified interacting with people, preparation skills, communication skills, teamwork skills, and rules and policies during the internship program as skills and knowledge fundamental for beginning Extension Educators. Interns stated that working with people both inside and outside of the office was the skill that they struggled with most in their internship. Interns specifically stated they struggled with being professional in different situations, making connections in the community, and working with an established staff within the Cooperative Extension Service office. Other fundamental skills that interns struggled with during their program involved organization and time management. The interns identified several ways to help future interns gain these skills including sessions at a summer training and intentional exposure to these skills and knowledge areas during the internship program.