Impacts of Undergraduate Equity and Inclusion Programs on Partner Organizations:

A case study of how DDCSP@UW impacts Conservation Organizations

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Abstract:

The Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program at the University of Washington is an undergraduate diversity bridge program designed to support students from historically underrepresented groups in preparing for careers in conservation, natural resources, and environmental management. The program's ultimate goal is to increase racial, ethnic, and gender diversity among staff and leadership of the U.S.-based conservation/environmental field. Here we report on a pilot study that assesses whether and how partnering with DDCSP@UW can facilitate organizational change toward greater equity within the conservation nonprofits and government agencies that host its interns, using data from semi-structured interviews with current and former mentors. We find that true progress toward a more equitable and diverse conservation field is slow and tentative, but that individual mentors can experience profound and lasting changes in personal attitudes and professional behavior that may ripple outward. We comment on specific programmatic elements of DDCSP@UW that seem particularly important in determining potential impacts.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background:

The roots of the American environmental movement are inextricably linked with white supremacy, colonialism, classism, and patriarchy (Purdy, 2020; Powell, 2016; Mowatt, 2020; DeLuca and Demo, 2001; Rashkow, 2014). One legacy of this history is the remarkable lack of diversity within U.S. environmental agencies, grantmaking foundations, and conservation NGOs—a problem the field has explicitly grappled with for decades (Sirgo, 2003; Taylor, 2014). Although the latest report from independent advocacy group Green 2.0 finds "measurable increases" in the number of employees and board members among environmental nonprofits and foundations who identify as people of color, staff at all levels remain predominantly white, especially senior staff—61.8% white—and executives—69% white (Green 2.0, 2022). The environmental justice movement has brought an increased understanding of the roles that race, class, and gender inequities play in driving the unequal

exposures to pollution, climate change, and other environmental risks faced by different groups, as well as the profound importance of diverse and equitable conservation workplaces in achieving environmental and conservation goals (Mohai et al., 2009; Schell et al., 2020; Pellow, 2016; Foster et al., 2014). As described by Gould et al., 2017, the lack of diversity within the conservation movement is "unethical," "illogical," and "limiting," since it leaves those most exposed to environmental degradation without a seat at the table, and entrusts a narrow constituency with disproportionate power over conservation and management decisions.

Educational programs intended to diversify the environmental movement have been active since at least the 1960s. Significant investments have been made in university-led programs that focus on recruiting and training students who hold marginalized identities, providing them experience and connections that will enhance their ability to secure positions in the field. When this is achieved by connecting students with local, regional/state, and national organizations to provide structured opportunities for them to gain professional experience (e.g. through internships, fellowships, networking, and/or mentorship), it is often termed "Community-Based Learning," or CBL. From the perspective of universities, CBL initiatives are a high-impact practice that contributes positively to student learning outcomes (Pellow, 2016; Driscoll, 2014). Similarly, creating and/or participating in such programs is a metric that is often used by conservation organizations to signal commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in internal program evaluations and reports to external grant-makers (Plante, 2004). But educational programs address only one side of the problem—increasing the number of young conservationists from diverse backgrounds—with little design given to addressing equitable workplaces. Without workplace change, they will inevitably fail at their goal.

1.2 DDCSP@UW as a case study:

Here we evaluate the impacts, on conservation professionals and organizations, of engaging with a university-led undergraduate educational program that has aimed to broaden participation in the conservation field. The Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program at the University of Washington (DDCSP@UW) was an initiative of the Doris Duke Foundation whose stated goal is to "increase the number of undergraduate students of color who choose to pursue coursework and careers in conservation" so that the field "fully reflect(s) the racial and ethnic makeup of the U.S.". It ran from 2014-2024 in support of 10 cohorts of undergraduates. Along with sister programs administered at other universities, DDCSP@UW recruited students from across the nation to participate in a paid two-summer program. In the case of DDCSP@UW, all scholars were brought to Seattle and Western Washington for programming in biocultural conservation and environmental justice in both of their summers, resulting in overlapping cohorts. In Year 1, students were embedded in an intensive conservation curriculum with their peers, visiting regional conservation organizations, meeting a range of

conservation professionals, and engaging in place-based learning about biodiversity and conservation practices; they also received training in leadership, advocacy, and environmental justice. In Year 2, each student was hosted by an organization which provided a mentor or mentors to support them in an seven-week internship (following pre-summer work to create an internship proposal and work plan) built around a conservation research project. There is a good deal of evidence, including from DDCSP@UW's own annual surveys of participating undergraduates, that internship-based experiential learning programs like ours benefit students from historically underrepresented groups in multiple ways. Students gain real-world job experience, broaden their professional networks, familiarize them with workplace norms and (often unspoken) expectations, and strengthen their sense of belonging and agency in addressing conservation and environmental justice issues (Thiem and Dsgupta, 2022). However, we know very little about the program's impact on mentors and partner organizations. Further, graduates of DDCSP@UW still face significant barriers to entry into and progress within the conservation field, suggesting that the changes we hope for require a sharper focus on organizational impacts.

There are multiple possible pathways through which programs like DDCSP@UW could impact both individual mentors and conservation organizations in terms of their orientations toward equity. Hosting interns offers mentors an opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with—and learn about the experiences of—young people who may hold different identities from them. To the extent that interns interact with other employees in their host organization, including senior staff and leaders, these interactions also have the potential to impact personal beliefs/behaviors. Internship projects, which are often shaped by interns' interests in the intersection between a host organization's conservation goals and broader themes of environmental justice, may leave a lasting mark. And finally, although the program's primary focus is on training and supporting its undergraduate interns, DDCSP@UW staff also engage mentors in programming that includes an orientation, guided development of a community agreement between mentors and interns, a required health and safety assessment and healthy workplace training, scaffolding for project development, exit interviews, and required attendance at an end-of-summer summit where all interns present their projects.

Given the breadth of potential impacts working with DDCSP interns may have had on our mentors and their organizations, we have three main research goals:

1. Characterize the universe of possible impacts partnering with the DDCSP@UW program has on conservation professionals (i.e. mentors), and assess whether these engagements help drive greater individual interest and engagement in advancing DEI-related goals within their organization or the field of conservation generally.

2. Assess whether partnering with DDCSP@UW catalyzes or informs any progress toward DEI-related goals by conservation organizations, either internally (e.g.

organizational policy changes, culture shifts, etc.) or externally (e.g. programming, community partnerships, advocacy, etc.)

3. Understand how specific elements of DDCSP@UW programming contribute positively or negatively to individual and/or organizational impacts, with the goal of developing best practices for similar university-led programs.

1.3 Reflexive Statements:

Meera Lee Sethi: I was born and raised in Singapore by my Punjabi father and Cantonese mother, both second-generation immigrants whose parents arrived from India and China respectively. Singapore is a post-colonial nation with a majority ethnic-Chinese population where racial dynamics are precariously and self-consciously managed by the state, whose goal is to achieve a harmonious "melting pot" of cultures. Growing up mixed-race in this setting has given me a wary appreciation for the relative openness with which political conversations about race and inequality take place in the United States. My academic and professional background includes training in comparative literature, education, and ecology, and I approached this study with a strong desire to learn more about—and do justice to—qualitative research methods. I have been working with DDCSP@UW in various capacities since 2016, when I was a Ph.D student in biology. As a former mentor turned staff member, I have both "insider" and "outsider" perspectives on the program that inevitably color my expectations about, and interpretations of, other mentors' experiences.

Martha Groom: I am a white, cis-female from a middle-class background who has been working in conservation since the mid-1980s. I grew up during the civil rights movement, which motivated me to pursue social justice and movement work via secondary degrees in public policy and politics while primarily focusing on ecology and conservation. Drawn to education, I've had the good fortune to be working among educators with critical approaches to their fields and their teaching, which laid the foundation for bringing a similar orientation to my work with DDCSP@UW. I'm one of the founders of the program, and have worked as a faculty lead since it began, working closely with all the scholars through the cohorts, and as a secondary mentor. I have talked with most of the mentors in the program through the years, and their comments made me curious to understand better how interactions with DDCSP interns impacted the mentors. My long history with the program inevitably may impact my interpretations of the mentors' reflections on their experience.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1 Data collection:

We treat data from DDCSP@UW as an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995); that is, an illustrative example of a reasonably typical case that provides insight into a larger phenomenon. Many structural elements of DDCSP@UW Year 2 are common features of internship-based diversity programs, including individual research projects, one-on-one mentorships with professionals, and reciprocal learning within a cohort; we therefore believe our results may be applicable beyond this particular program. A case study approach is appropriate in situations where the goal is to develop an in-depth understanding of a complex issue in a natural, real-world context that is difficult and/or undesirable to control experimentally (Rust et al., 2017; Yin, 2009; Danter et al., 2000). In addition, the practical knowledge gained from case studies, especially when they focus on common problems, can be a powerful way to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Kohm et al, 2000). We used semi-structured interviews—in which all interviewees are asked the same predetermined, open-ended questions, but the interviewer may follow conversational trajectories at their discretion—because they are an excellent fit for exploratory research and allowed us flexibility to pursue themes with individual participants as they arose (Adams, 2015). Ethical approval for the project was provided by the University of Washington's Human Subjects Division (Project ID STUDY00015030).

Our pool of potential interviewees included all the conservation professionals who served as mentors for DDCSP@UW at least once since 2015, the year the first cohort of students participated in internships. Not including the authors, who had both served as mentors in the early years of the program, this group comprised 62 people. We aimed to interview up to 20 former mentors, based on the following overarching criteria:

i. Including a range of organization size and type (i.e. including small and large nonprofits, government agencies, community organizations, etc.).

ii. Including mentors with both marginalized and majoritarian identities.

iii. Including mentors from all years of the program's existence, to capture both short- and long-term impacts.

To reduce bias in interviewee selection, we used a random number generator to select 40 rows in our master spreadsheet of mentors (anticipating an approximately 50% response rate), checked to make sure this list adhered to the criteria above, and sent out a first round of invitations to participate in the project. Due to a relatively low initial response rate, we sent an additional 10 purposive (targeted) invitations, to increase the number and diversity of interviewees.

We developed an interview guide in collaboration with our consultant partners (see Appendix). Our questions focused on: 1) participants' personal engagements with DEI-related practices and processes; 2) DEI-related practices and processes implemented by the organizations they worked for while they were mentors; and 3) how partnering with DDCSP

UW and hosting interns intersected with or impacted 1) and 2). All interviews were conducted via Zoom by the first author between November 2022 and February 2023, and lasted an average of 43 minutes. Audio recordings were automatically transcribed using Otter.ai before being edited for accuracy and clarity by the first author and passed back to interviewees for review.

Although all the final participants in this project were non-Indigenous, we drew on decolonial research methodologies centered on Indigenous ethics of truth-telling and relational accountability as we planned for, collected, and analyzed data (Simonds and Christopher, 2013; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). In particular, we prioritized reciprocity, care, and respect between ourselves and our interviewees, recognizing that all our interactions were grounded in our shared personal history with DDCSP@UW and a shared vision for building a more inclusive and equitable community of conservation practice. In providing verbal informed consent, our participants not only understood that no published reports would contain any information that could be used to identify them or their employers; they were also invited to be co-owners and co-creators of their own data, with full pre-publication access to the transcripts of their interviews, including the authority to revise and redact. Ultimately, only three participants requested edits to their transcripts, all of which were minor (e.g. changing a question to a statement; rephrasing an idea for greater clarity).

2.2 Qualitative Analysis:

To conduct our thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, we used an iterative process roughly corresponding to the steps outlined by Braun and Clark, 2006. First-author M. Sethi read and re-read the transcripts, highlighting key phrases and creating codes (shorthand labels) to capture each individual idea or feeling that was expressed. This resulted in a total of 83 preliminary codes. Next, she organized the codes into three categories corresponding to the three research goals, and identified major themes and sub-themes within each category. Each major theme represented a core recurring concept expressed by a majority of interviewees, while sub-themes were smaller ideas describing different facets or manifestations of a major theme. After reading and re-reading all the transcripts, co-author M. Groom commented on and revised the draft themes and sub-themes, reaching consensus with M. Sethi on a candidate list that was shared with all participants to ensure we were not misrepresenting their experiences, or missing any essential ideas. Participant feedback was incorporated into the final list of themes described in our Results section below.

We consider our overall approach a form of interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2017; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013). By this we simply mean that our primary goal was to explore our interviewees' subjective personal perceptions, descriptions, and interpretations of their own lived experiences, as opposed to attempting to use interview

transcripts to arrive at an assessment of some objective "truth." In addition, to the extent that we as researchers have gone beyond our participants' own sense-making in identifying, making connections between, and interpreting themes in the data, we acknowledge that these efforts are inevitably colored by our own histories and values (see Reflexive Statements above). In the remaining sections of this report, we preferentially share substantial quotations from interviews rather than short phrases or single sentences, with the goal of allowing our participants' own words to speak for themselves as far as possible. Language that appears within brackets in quotations has been inserted by us to add context or clarify the speaker's meaning, and is not verbatim. We also removed some verbal stops, such as "um", "like" or "you know" to increase readability. Pseudonyms are used throughout to replace the real names of both interviewees and, when mentioned, interns.

3. Results

We interviewed 16 former mentors in total, or about 1 out of every 4 individuals who mentored for DDCSP@UW between 2015 and 2022. Consistent with overall trends among volunteer mentors in the United States (Raposa et al., 2017), most DDCSP@UW mentors identified as white (11 participants), straight (15 participants), and female (11 participants). During their time as mentors, the organizations they worked for included small NGOs[1] (2 participants); medium-sized NGOs (4 participants); very large NGOs (3 participants); city/county-level governments (4 participants); tribal governments (1 participant); and academic laboratories (2 participants).

We identified five major themes and 13 sub-themes relating to our three research focuses, and these are presented in Table 1. Major themes are formulated as broad statements about the program, and sub-themes in terms of specific ideas we heard mentors express.

[1] We informally defined small NGOs as those with fewer than 10 staff and less than $1 million in expenses; medium NGOs as those with 10-30 staff and up to $3 million in expenses; and very large NGOs as those with more than 100 staff and more than $50 million in expenses).

Research focus	**Major theme/s**	**Sub-theme/s**
DDCSP@UW impacts on individual mentors	*1. Mentors develop relationships with interns that support equity-promoting behaviors.*	*• Not everyone has access to the same professional opportunities as I do.* *• Not everyone experiences the same level of safety in professional settings as I do.* *• Working with DDCSP@UW interns gave me an opportunity to explore, understand, and develop intentional practices around my own identity in conservation.*
	2. Mentors are energized by interns in ways that positively impact their work in conservation.	*• My interns renewed my sense of purpose and joy in conservation work.* *• I am inspired by the spirit of activism I see in my interns.*
DDCSP@UW impacts on conservation organizations	*3. Partnering with DDCSP@UW can leave marks, if small, on host organizations.*	*• I personally pushed for change in my organization in part as a result of mentoring with DDCSP@UW.* *• Partnering with DDCSP@UW highlighted limitations in my organization that I or my co-workers took to heart.* *• In implementing our own internship program, my organization borrowed structures/practices from DDCSP@UW because we could see that they worked.*
	4. True organizational change is often slow and incremental.	*• Barriers to change at my workplace are both internal (e.g. resource limitations) and external (e.g. systemic forces).* *• Leaders mediate the speed of organizational change.*

DDCSP@UW programming	*5. The impacts of working with DDCSP@UW are strengthened because of specific practices that are not present in all internship programs.*	• *It was more demanding to be a mentor for DDCSP@UW than other programs, but this made the experience richer for both me and my interns.* • *DDCSP@UW provided resources that set me up for success.* • *DDCSP@UW creates community, and is not just an educational program.*

Table 1: Major themes and sub-themes.

3.1 Impacts on Individual Mentors

Theme 1: Mentors develop relationships with interns that support equity-promoting behaviors. Despite the brief length of the summer programming period, many intern-mentor pairs form deep and meaningful relationships that last, in some cases, for years afterward. We heard this clearly throughout our interviews. As IW put it: "What stands out with the mentorship itself with the scholars that we had was a really wonderful interpersonal relationship -- I felt I could trust them, and I felt that they could trust us." As DDCSP@UW staff and former mentors ourselves, we have first-hand experience with how quickly significant bonds can be formed. What we learned from our study is that these connections also have a power that goes beyond the personal. We in no way pretend to empirically assess improvements in cultural or diversity competencies that result from mentoring with DDCSP@UW. However, almost all of our participants described specific insights they felt they gained as a result of their relationships with their interns that pushed them to develop more intentional, equitable practices in their work lives.

One such insight is summarized in the first sub-theme: *Not everyone has access to the same professional opportunities as I do*. Several interviewees referred to specific experiences that brought home their own relative privilege in a manner that felt acute or visceral, and contributed to a desire to work towards increasing access for others. For example, DN, a white woman who mentored FD, a Chinese-American intern, recounted his joyful, wondering reaction when their team had an unexpected opportunity to meet with a Chinese-American forest service district ranger on a fieldwork trip. His excitement surprised her, and prompted her to reflect for the first time on the ease with which she herself had always been able to envision a career in conservation:

> "He came away from that meeting, just like, 'You can—I can do—we're in the middle of nowhere, Washington, and I could…[miming astonishment] Like, I've NEVER seen that before!' And...it was so

> clear to me...how completely I take for granted how much I have for my entire life seen myself, in careers, in places, in you know...I'm wearing Chacos, just like the rest of the staff! And you know, that's just my world. And so many students feel like 'Yeah, it's beautiful, but where am I?' So… that one experience from my time with, with FD [became] this sort of transformation for me of realizing how just, I guess the word is 'unimaginable', career tracks might be for, for people with different identities than I have...I grew up doing this. But that wasn't the case for them....This switch really flipped in terms of who I was in that space." —DN

This incident took place a full 6 years before our interview, but once that "switch" flipped, according to DN, it stayed on. In her case, what this has meant is a lasting commitment to using the power she has to broaden participation for people who haven't traditionally been represented in conservation. She explained:

> "[I've really tried to] make that place and broaden that participation —given the power that I have—for folks otherwise not represented in the conservation field…I think the most relevant example right now is that I worked…to support several students in coming to [conservation meeting] this summer….that's just one recent example…and then I think my, the lessons learned...just have kind of permeated my teaching and my mentorship…since then." —DN

TC, a mentor of color who has been involved in biological research since her undergraduate years, prefaced the following reflection by describing her own journey this way: "I felt like opportunities kind of just found themselves to me, and I didn't have to seek them out as much as maybe somebody else had to." Then she spoke about realizing that specific aspects of the academic and scientific world she had previously considered common knowledge were actually opaque to the two DDCSP@UW interns she worked with. She found herself teaching them about this "hidden curriculum," and felt a lot of satisfaction in being able to foster their excitement and love for research. This led to a small but persistent change in the way she now approaches mentorship:

> "I remember [my intern BR] said that she was not interested at all in any more school after she finished her bachelor's. And it's crazy that at the end of two weeks, she was asking me to be on her committee or for post grad programs. And now she's in a certificate program. And [my intern RY], she asked, she was, I remember, she was really surprised to find out that you don't have to pay to get a PhD. And watching her kind of start, like, you can see the gears in her brain thinking 'Oh my gosh, I can keep going and doing this!' and… it was just really cool to kind of be a part of that, and witness those little transformations super early on, and in a small way kind of maybe help those trajectories a little bit…listening to them, you know, be really surprised that a PhD isn't something that you pay for, being surprised that you can publish a paper when you're an undergrad. And being surprised you can go to a conference and things like that, that really just made me realize that oh, maybe the system isn't as navigable as I thought it was, maybe I somehow was able to navigate it, for a better luck of the card or privilege, or whatever, right, than they had been able to… that made me realize that oh, this is an actual systemic problem that I maybe personally wasn't affected by. And so I didn't really pay as much attention. But now…I try to think about how I can make it painfully obvious to students who may not know…that's one tangible example that I can point to, and I wouldn't have really prioritized [it] maybe

if I hadn't had that experience with them." —TC

One of the most powerful interviews contributing to this sub-theme came from ES, who mentored or co-mentored over a dozen DDCSP@UW interns between 2015 and 2019, and developed remarkably deep relationships with many of them. During our conversation he referred affectionately to multiple interns he had mentored—people who had attended his wedding, who had come to stay at his house, with whom he had traveled internationally, and with whom he had exchanged texts only hours before we met. Of some of these individuals, he said: "We'll be in each other's lives, I truly feel, forever." A white man raised in a middle-class family in a rural area, ES explicitly identified how some of his perspectives on the world had been challenged as a result of being a DDCSP@UW mentor. As with the examples of TC and DN above, these experiences seemed strongly emotional (as opposed to intellectual). They occurred as a result of the genuine relationships ES formed with interns whose identities and histories differed profoundly from his own:

"I spent so much time building relationships with these kids, and it was so important for me, you know, I'd have them come over to my house and just talk to them and you know, we'd cook them dinner…kids would camp out in my backyard and stuff….

I remember WT [an intern with DACA status] talking to me. She lives in a garage with her mom…that was her living conditions, you know, they were saving up money desperately. Not for things like an Xbox or whatever it is, a car, but to get her mom's citizenship, because she was afraid she was going to get deported. I mean, that sort of stuff really puts life in [perspective]…

We all grew up in our certain comfort zones and our certain areas and stuff. So stepping out of those comfort zones is tough. It's tough for everybody. Right? And I think the DDCSP forced me to do that a lot, right? I never spent two hours in a vehicle with somebody from [country name]...it forced me to learn and step outside of my comfort zones...that's how I learn. That's how my [mostly white, male] staff learn…I remember having a one-on-one conversation with WT for hours one day, with her crying about, like the stress that she's having going through the process of her mom. I think it's, it's just an experience you never, you never have, right? You see it on the news and stuff like that, right?...getting to know people and their stories is just powerful, and then listening to them and understanding also that this is a person that really makes the world just so much, just such a brighter place."—ES

We hesitate to draw a direct line between ES's experiences with the program and any actions or decisions he has taken in his professional capacity since then. However, when explicitly asked to consider the impacts the program has had on the way he approaches the idea of equity in conservation, ES expressed that "a big one" was that some of his DDCSP@UW interns are likely to come to his mind when he has the opportunity to consider job applicants and their resumes. Specifically, he explained that what might previously have

looked like obvious deficiencies in a candidate's educational qualifications or levels of experience would now strike him quite differently:

> "And … it was just like realizing also, in the future when I interview biologists, or whatever it is, for positions—that it's a lot easier for somebody like me to gain all that experience, it's a lot easier for somebody like me to move up in the chain of command. Because I've been given all these opportunities and privilege—like in my summers, I could take internships, non-paid internships, to build experience. And that's not a reality for somebody like [GG, another intern with DACA status]...somebody like GG falls behind applying for a biologist position versus somebody like me going through college, right? Because… [GG is] having to work his tail off to help support his family, for example…. I'll say you can kind of tailor, you can write jobs to be more inclusive for people, and that's something I've tried to do in my practices, right...not always requiring somebody to have a college degree, right? And then working on training and trying to work with them to then, if it's something that they're interested in, to work with them to get that degree."—ES

Given that systemic and structural barriers in the United States often limit educational and work opportunities by race, we find ES's reflections a particularly powerful marker of the program's potential to promote tangible change. Importantly, however, the extent to which a mentor can be transformed by their participation in a program like DDCSP@UW likely depends in large part on their individual attitudes. ES was one of many interviewees who expressed a high degree of curiosity and humility in describing their relationships with their interns. We believe, and their words reflect, that there is power in approaching the experience of mentorship as a reciprocal exchange of knowledge and experience:

> "Just being able to listen to the scholars talk about their work has been really meaningful…things are changing fast in the world in the last few years. And I think being able to listen to the scholars who range in age and experience and background, it's really valuable, like getting to hear their stories about the conservation work they're doing, but also how it intersects with identity and their background and experiences." —KS

> "I think kind of the lens of…how someone that's just stepping out into…kind of feeling out how workplace engagement or environments are, for the first time. Like really trying to, I think, have awareness of how is our organization for a young person that has never experienced other professional environments? And are there ways that we can do better? Are there ways that I personally can impact that?"—MD

The second sub-theme we identified under this umbrella was: *Not everyone experiences the same level of safety in professional settings as I do.* A growing body of data shows that people who hold marginalized identities—including non-white, disabled, and LGBTQIA+ researchers—are more likely to experience discrimination or harassment while conducting fieldwork (Demery and Pipkin, 2021; Viglione, 2020; Henderson, 2009; Hall et al., 2007). Most conservation professionals working in the field today have at least a passing familiarity with these research findings. But in one interview, Isabel, a white woman,

expressed how what had previously been purely theoretical risks became fully embodied when she learned how they affected the two young women of color she mentored:

> "And then when we were out there with…the mentees—we had some of those conversations in the car and they confirmed that their lived experience makes these types of situations more uncomfortable. Which again, when I say that they, like, drove two hours to Nowhere Land with no cell reception to do their fieldwork together—that was huge in my mind. And we really were able to successfully, thankfully, set the stage where they felt comfortable, and they had the tools…to deal with the situations that they might come across. So it, it made it real for me. It wasn't just a discussion that I was having in a committee meeting… these are young individuals that I care about. And I am in some ways responsible for their safety and their wellbeing, not just physically, but emotionally. And it really made me be more thoughtful about the situations that you ask people to put themselves in [to accomplish the environmental goals]." —IW

FM, a white woman who is the executive director of her small nonprofit, described a similar shift in her thinking about what safety in the field entails. She noted how her experience with the program prompted her to take a small but significant step to protect all of her employees, not just interns, from hostile encounters in the field that might be especially threatening to field workers who hold marginalized identities:

> "We always did have a little safety checklist...but the things I focus on have changed a little bit. You know, in the past it was like trips and falls, deep water, bee stings. And now I'm also mentioning just your general comfort and feeling in the field. And I think, my take to my staff now more than ever is just like if you're ever feeling uncomfortable, or unsafe, call me or leave, or both… I do think that that's the big piece. It's just a bigger attention on the less physical, acts of nature, safety aspect…One of the things we did at the recommendation of the Doris Duke Program is vests with our logo on them that just announce us as somebody official and associated with our organization. And now that's required in the field for all my staff... we bought a ton of them…and we're like, wow, these are actually awesome. Let's have these all the time. Yeah, so I love that, that's a really tangible impact." —FM

We note that FM chose to provide safety vests displaying their affiliation to everyone working for her organization, not just interns or staff of color. This is an example of how inclusive practices originally developed to support or increase accessibility for vulnerable groups can have positive effects for a much wider range of people—a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the "curb-cut effect" (Blackwell, 2017). We also note that FM was able to quickly and easily make this change because of her leadership role within the organization (see Theme 4 below).

The third sub-theme we identified here was: *Working with DDCSP@UW interns gave me an opportunity to explore, understand, and develop intentional practices around my own identity in conservation.* Several mentors noted that they shared one or more identities with their interns. When this happened, it created points of emotional connection, opened doors into rich conversations about common experiences and goals,

and prompted mentors to more deeply consider how these identities affect their own work. And, mentors expressed how their experiences as individuals belonging to racial or gender minority groups feeds their personal commitment to making conservation a place where people like them are welcomed—through, among other things, participation in DDCSP@UW:

> "As a mentor, I got two students who I felt I could connect with … I mean, I'm a brown young woman, and so I just got two young brown women, and it was great. Really, it was really easy to see myself in them. And I hope that it was easy for them to see themselves in me. And… especially see themselves, not too far in the future, hopefully." —TC

> "Being Black and mixed race and queer, and disabled, has been the three biggest parts, or things that I bring into this work, identity wise…And… when I think of conservation, I'm like, okay, conservation is kind of a self serving thing for humans to do. Because at the end of the day … the Earth will be here way longer than we will be, so it's kind of we *have* to center people in this work if we want to do it well. And then I think with the interns, it's just been really beautiful to be able to be a mentor that the interns see themselves in… And I think those connections have been really deep because we've been able to connect over identities and what it means to be doing this work and hold those identities." —JY

> "...for me it was really such a huge, significant part of the internship—for me as a mentor—was just being able to listen to those kinds of stories and make parallel connections between their stories around conservation and challenges that they feel, working in conservation or wanting to do the work that they want to do in conservation, but not necessarily knowing how, especially with all these different identities that they hold….Part of it, too, I think being BIPOC, all of us were also, well, we don't necessarily have role models as well for how to [follow a conservation path] within our families…And also just being a woman as well, like in STEM, in, just in conservation, and because my students identified as women as well, I feel like there was almost—there's just a natural bond that happened, at least that I remember. And, and I think those identities that I held, really shaped the way that I thought about the work that I was doing, and also shaped the way that I felt about how I belonged in the work that I was doing."—KH

> "I remember how hard those years were...thinking that you want to do something and feeling powerless, like you couldn't get the opportunities that you wanted or you couldn't get the exposure or the experience... [when I got this job,] I told myself that I would do everything in my power to get anybody who wanted to be here, here...I wanted to be the person that I wished that I had had when I was that nine-year-old girl…"—BL

> "The scholars often have different identities than me. And I want to make sure that they feel safe in that identity and in that space that we're in…I can see, as a woman in the field, how terrible it is when a man says something crappy to me. And so then I can feel that sense of like, Oh my God, any other intersecting identities here...that's got to be 1000 times worse, right?...And I just know that I want to build this space to be one that women feel comfortable in. And any other identities feel comfortable in." —FM

> "It was just nice to be able to have those conversations [about race and equity in conservation]... you get there more quickly with the conservation scholars because it's just front of mind, right?... [the interns] are like, 'Let's go, let's do it! Let's talk about all the things!' And so it's really nice to get to have a space where that comes forward…I think for every person how that affects them—there's probably some similarities, but there's a lot of different flavors for navigating your identity in a space that's generally been white-led, cis male led, you know...there was a lot I had to reckon with as being now part of the machine in a way, right. And how to, I want to say make peace with that. I don't know if that's the right phrase, but how to, how to be able to integrate that that's true, that this is a place I choose to work...I can't change the fact that it was historically white-led...but it is, it is on me now to be a part of it not fully defining how [my organization] is in the future." —SV

This sub-theme also reflects conversations we had with mentors who acknowledged the privileges associated with some of the identities they hold, and wanted to use that power to open doors and even the playing field for people like their DDCSP@UW interns:

> "[I understand] that what that has meant, it has been many opportunities for me in many cases....being honest about that, instead of trying to rustle up some ways in which I have not been granted privilege in my life, I think that's the most useful way to start to see, okay, well, where are these disconnects? Or what is it that helps me on this track, but not you, say?" —DN

> "...when I was younger, I always knew that a career in conservation was an option. My parents were definitely of the generation. You can do whatever you, whatever you want to be. And I knew that if I worked hard enough, I would, I would get there one day. But I reflect back that that's not the experience that a lot of people have had. And that they don't always see themselves reflected in the conservation community. And that's something that I want to shake up." —VG

> "That's [my identity] – white, young male, with middle income, so I'm real, real stable in my own existence, which is nice, which is really nice for me. So, I come in with a good amount of power and a good amount of ability to take risks. Like really 'Oh! I'm just gonna start this program!' Or kind of force things to happen."—SE

> "[I'm] always thinking that, recognizing, you know, as a white male from the Boomer generation, I had many privileges and benefits that others don't have. And so I've been trying to do what I can to make a little bit of a difference. And I like to think that that commitment has played out in a positive way. And that not only have I made some positive advances on the environmental front, but I've also had a positive influence on people. And hopefully, as I said, some of those folks have gone on to, if not, work in the conservation field, just have gone on to do good things in their career."—SP

Theme 2: Mentors are energized by interns in ways that positively impact their work in conservation. Many mentors we spoke to highlighted the sheer pleasure of working with young people who came into their organizations buzzing with excitement

about new experiences and learning opportunities, and who brought fresh ideas and perspectives with them. Nearly three-quarters of interviewees contributed to the sub-theme: *My interns renewed my sense of purpose and joy in conservation work.* The following are some of the ways mentors expressed these feelings of reaffirmation and rejuvenation in their work:

> "We stopped where there was this gorgeous overlook of Mount Rainier. And the girls were just blissful, and so full of joy. And so excited to see Mount Rainier. And I think being from Washington state, we sometimes take these things for granted. And it was just pure joy in that moment…you forget what pure joy feels like, and then you're sharing it with these people. …And I realized that, I had kind of been in this slow gradual decline of just being sort of like a pessimist … you know, the environmental field can be so depressing sometimes to work in, and it can just wear on you. And I do feel like just being around them for the summer was kind of like a little bit of a reset, of like, okay, I can look at things more positively. And that's not gonna kill me, to be less of a pessimist!...I'm so thankful for them." —MD

> "I was in a place where I wasn't sure if what I was doing had any meaning beyond just, my getting a paycheck. And so it felt really fulfilling to know that the work that I'm doing...resonates with people at different levels, and it can really make a difference to the field...it was really cool to see how [the scholars] kind of opened up to me in telling me what they're interested in and what they find joy in and me trying to fit things to that need for them...I think it was just really cool to kind of be a part of that. And witness those little transformations...and in a small way kind of maybe help those trajectories a little bit." —TC

> "We went out in the field and ended up not making it as far as we had planned for various reasons, you know, and spent a lot of time just kind of playing…And it was just really special to just have that moment where it's like, yeah, this is what fieldwork can be right? I'm also a very production-oriented person— I want to get stuff done. And so like taking that moment to pause, and relish in that fun, was really special…Seeing people experience [fieldwork] for the first time and love it is like, so cool to me." —FM

> "And it's also very inspirational… they would show up to the office. And, you know, we're in this environmental field, where we're fighting for trees, for snakes, for…rivers in this huge logging country, right…And so, just to have these new perspectives and stuff, I would see it in the staff and programs I manage, like it would bring life to them. Because you have all sudden this influx of kids that come in with this high energy and want to learn, and they want to share their experiences, and it would, like, rejuvenate and bring a lot of really positive energy to, to our organization, and also different ways about thinking and doing things."—ES

> "They're just so wonderful. It was their energy. It was their skills. It was like just a new, fresh perspective. I feel like it's easy to sort of feel stagnant....There's not really a lot of injection of new ideas or new things. It's just, this is the way we've been doing it for 40 years, everything's fine. And it's hard to not get sucked into that a little bit…So some of the questions that [intern] was asking, some of the

things that he was interested in, might not be something that would come to the forefront of my mind. And so I think you're getting a different product and a better product at the end of it. And just his wealth of knowledge of the things that he was interested in was incredible. He's like, 'Oh, well, I saw this thing this one time at this place,' or 'Oh, have you thought about doing it this way?' Yeah, [he] just brought a ton of value to our program." —BL

Another way in which the mentorship experience positively affected mentors is captured in the sub-theme: *I am inspired by the spirit of activism I see in my interns.* Since DDCSP@UW's mission is to diversify the conservation field, it tends to attract undergraduate applicants with a strong existing interest in social justice and environmental activism, both of which are also core concepts taught in the program's first year curriculum. Well over half of our participants said that they saw these values in the questions their interns asked, the things they noticed and prioritized, and their commitment to being part of the movement for positive social and environmental change—ES even remembered his interns choosing to spend some of their days off marching in solidarity with community members protesting a mining company's proposed rail project. Mentors described this enthusiasm as motivating and infectious:

"I do remember even one specific example of [being on a hiring committee with] a very, very esteemed elder statesman of [my scientific field] on the committee—I mean and there was one woman that we had in the final set of four and—you know, [the esteemed colleague] basically made some comment about like, 'Well, she didn't even know this, or she'd never done that.' And I, I remember quaking, but saying, 'Remember that different people with different genders speak to their abilities or their knowledge in different ways, and frame things differently. And, and so sure, she may be speaking to something where she feels she needs to grow. Other candidates might not have said that, and would have said, *Of course, I can do that no problem'*. And…I think it really did stick with me as a moment of, oh, I would not have done this several years ago, and to have been in places [with DDCSP@UW] where I saw just the strength and the power and the beauty of the self-advocacy of so many of those scholars…and the self empowerment there, and then that empowering me."—DN

"And that's one of the things about working with the conservation scholars, they give me hope, you know, because of how... this particular generation, especially, because of the times that they've grown up in, that they're so hopeful, they're so collaborative, they're so community minded, you know, is what I'm finding out. That compared to when I was that age, I feel like my generation was rather self centered and too much about money, you know…just having conversations with them and about their work…that spirit was really present…when I saw the presentations from the second years, after they had done their practicums, and one of the things that really struck me was the frustration and anger at the partners that they worked with. Again, this is a situation where the scholars knew more about DEI than the people that they work with, and so what I got out of it is that the scholars did like an analysis of the place that they were working at, and they diagnosed all these things. And… they were just so stoked about *'This needs to change!*'" —CE

"...just being involved with the program … keeps it front of mind. Keeps the lens, you know, the glasses on to be like, okay, how am I framing this in the context of our world and how people are treated within it?...I learned a lot just being, kind of getting to touch…the nature of the conversations, and hear the

perspective on this field, and just kind of the lens that is being applied for those scholars, helps me reframe my own lens, and make sure that I'm considering that, make sure that I'm speaking about it. And so it's helpful on a personal note, just to just have that awareness kind of in the atmosphere." —SV

"...with our work, especially at such a big organization, you do get bogged down in the day-to-day minutia of work and how long things take…we all get into this field because we want to make a difference in the environment, in our community. But it's easy to become jaded over time with just how long it takes to make progress. And it was cool to see…big and small ways that young people can come in and just shake things up." —VG

"For me, it was a hole that I felt needed to be filled. I wanted a more tangible way for my work to really include people that haven't maybe been included in as many conversations around conservation as really they should be. So it was a hole for me personally. And I think just seeing the way how, I mean even though our program…isn't necessarily focused around equity and social justice, it's something that most of the interns that we get are still really really passionate about. I think it gives me a lot of hope that this generation is just so excited about it. It's so —I'm sorry! [gets emotional] Just hearing their ideas and looking at things from different perspectives has been great." —LT

3.2 DDCSP@UW Impacts on Organizations:

Theme 3: Partnering with DDCSP@UW can leave marks, if small, on host organizations. When we asked interviewees to reflect on whether and how their organizations had been affected by hosting DDCSP@UW interns, some described changes that they themselves had helped to instigate—motivated in part by their experiences with the program. For example, mentors successfully argued for more equitable practices within their workplace, like paying interns and instituting official health and safety policies that include safeguards against harassment in the field. These responses are captured in the sub-theme: *I personally pushed for change in my organization in part as a result of mentoring with DDCSP@UW*:

"Aside from the DDCSP program, we have two different programs that need intern help. And previously, they were either unpaid or it was just a joke, they were paid so little that they might as well [have] been paid nothing at all, which isn't really an option. That means that only a fraction of the people that are eligible or interested in this opportunity actually get to come here… And so we've really been mindful of that… I think…both the programs now pay their interns above minimum wage. And that was a really hard fought battle, that we're very happy that we won….

…We didn't have [a health and safety plan, required by DDCSP@UW from all host organizations] at first. So I wrote…this, like, 20-page crazy thing of, like health and safety, and DEI work. But when we have our large staff meeting in December… I am planning on sharing that and having it be something that's officially adopted both into the handbook and then into things to come… [because] I was like are you kidding me? We don't have one of these?...And so it was just a good internal check." —BL

> "We have offered internships in the past that really were underfunded or not funded at all. So kind of like 'You're gaining all this great experience! And it'll step you up for your profession!'...I have really pushed and I think it's finally started to take a little more root, that the only folks that are able and capable to take unpaid internships are going to be white upper class, well funded, well to do, better off families. It's completely inequitable. And so we need to make sure we have compensation built into our annual budgets for interns…I think it's a really wonderful thing that there is compensation through DDCSP, and [I'm] not trying to take advantage of that. But trying to bring that lens forward, like, 'Look, the reason that these young scholars from different places and different backgrounds and different ethnic, like upbringings… the reason they're able to do this is because Doris Duke has compensation and some sort of stipend, and it's bringing, it's making it a more equitable experience,' and actually, really raising up those students that are underrepresented. So I think, bringing that lens back to the org and saying…make sure you buffer in your budget [to] pay your summer interns…that's really a part of equitability. So that's probably the best thing that I've been able to bring back to the org… look at this program doing this wonderful thing. And we should try to mirror that if we can—in the way that we support people, and interns."—MD

In a few cases, interviewees described instances where DDCSP@UW interns hosted by their organization had explicitly provided critical input on, or raised questions about, workplace culture or practices. We grouped these contributions under the sub-theme: *Partnering with DDCSP@UW highlighted limitations in my organization that I or my co-workers took to heart*. SV and SP offered two of the clearest examples of this kind of experience:

> "I think Doris Duke was one of the canaries in the coal mine for us, and I'll explain what I mean by that… [describes at length a prior summer when she was still new in her organization, and colleagues of hers mentored DDCSP@UW interns who had a "rough experience" with the "corporate nonprofit" workplace culture.] [The interns] were just sort of like, 'How are you addressing equity here?'. ..In taking in these experiences, [the interns] were asking questions that were, I mean, clearly, we should have seen coming! I mean, come on now. You know, they're in a learning space. They're also like, 'What's this about?' And I don't remember the specifics. And I was not their mentor. I just kind of understood that that's kind of how things sort of played out, that it was—it created sort of an uncomfortable thing where we didn't have good answers, right, [my organization]. We didn't have good answers for their questions. And I, I think there was a lot that—of ripple effects of that. Being uncomfortable and realizing, Ooh, that didn't go well, and they didn't feel great about their experience. And I only got to interact with them a little bit, and I was largely unaware of this till later. But when I [said] 'Oh, I'm thinking of getting involved in Doris Duke, what do y'all think it'd be like?' [my colleagues responded] 'Well, we did have this, I just want to let you know, the experience we had was kind of rough. I don't know if they want to work with us.' And…that didn't sit well, right? People didn't feel good about how that went. And I do think it fomented change down the line. [Because we didn't] have a good way of answering, how are we diversifying hiring? … I think it really did force some reflection, it did get woven into things that have changed in how we approach and how we think about what we do, whether it be internal practices or our work out externally in conservation. So I really

appreciate that. And it affected what I did to be a mentor. And I made sure I put that—those questions and those discussions first— like front-forward…

…Those kinds of experiences and knowing the harm they were doing to people we want to support in the field, have an influence on things like…the conversation around developing an equity statement; or what would we want to do as an organization differently. [And] that equity statement has influenced other chapters, the folks who were the sub-team leads on that have presented to other parts of [the organization] to help them understand the process we went through, lessons learned… the ripple effects could be indirect, but they can be quite large, and in an organization of [several thousand] staff around the world…that's pretty cool."—SV

"I guess I can really point to something that [my intern MS] said on many occasions, and she included in her report. And it was reinforcement of the need to focus attention on supporting community organizations so that they feel more empowered. And for actually increasing our staffing…I like to think that we are not biased. But she made it pretty clear that even though we weren't overtly [biased], that we were not able to communicate as effectively with the [stakeholders] we're serving, being old white males. And—she didn't say it like that, but she made it pretty clear that, you know, we talk a good game. But in my unit, there's [over a dozen] of us, we have one person of color…she said, that's not enough. And so I have used that message to support my requests for additional funding, and to ensure that I get support for building our program. And I've referred specifically to what she has said....I think I've always understood the need to have a diverse workforce….I will admit that I haven't done as much as I could have. And one thing about MS is she's very open. And I respected that. And I didn't resent it, I didn't take offense at it. I didn't become defensive, it just sort of made me want to redouble my efforts. Because if she, if she was seeing it in such a short period of time with us, then there's clearly an issue."—SP

The final sub-theme we identified in this section was: *In implementing our own internship program, my organization borrowed structures/practices from DDCSP@UW because we could see that they worked.* For example, some mentors explained that they or their organizations had been directly influenced by DDCSP@UW when planning for the recruitment, selection, and structure of internal internship programs:

"We've looked at [DDCSP@UW] both as a structure for how we would eventually like to set up our internship programs, and as far as the wealth of resources that come with it: The onboarding process, how to find housing… anytime we had something going on we would be taking notes—'Oh, this worked really well.' Or 'Oh, we could see maybe some extra work in this particular area,' kind of thing. So yes, yes [the structure of DDCSP@UW has helped]. A thousand times, yes."—BL

"I think certainly looking at our recruitment process…sometimes we didn't want it to be, who was the most qualified. The people who are most qualified probably had the most opportunities. And we wanted to really make diversity and equity the focus of this internship. So our recruitment for sure, our internship questions, interview questions, some of those have been focused around asking about what

community means to them, and what, how they engage with diversity and equity in their day to day lives….when we do our interviews with the potential interns, as well, we try to incorporate, we're not copying the questions that you guys have! [laughs]...But I think there's quite a bit of overlap with asking them about their interactions with their communities and how they view diversity, equity and inclusion in their lives, that I think there's a lot of overlap…And also just having a cohort. I mean, as simple as that. … I think we always had three interns at a time from the Doris Duke program. And that worked out really well because they became such a tight knit group. We knew we didn't want to bring in a single intern because they feed off of each other and they really, they get more out of each other…And like I said, everything's kind of merged together where I don't at this point, I don't know where it came from, but I know that it's been impacted by our interactions [with DDCSP@UW] as we're establishing our program."—VG

Other interviewees highlighted the fact that DDCSP@UW mentors are expected to co-develop individual projects with their interns that are based on both the organization's needs and the young people's independent professional and personal goals. They contrasted this against their past experiences supervising interns from other programs, who were often "delegated" to do minor or repetitive tasks; or, if they did take on more independent work, this was selected from a list of whatever the organization needed to have done. DDCSP@UW projects are typically more involved, and more driven by individual interests. For example, interns have spearheaded data collection efforts to assess the effectiveness of different management strategies; designed and implemented surveys to better understand the needs/attitudes of stakeholders; produced informal science educational materials; organized outreach events; and even worked on creative projects (zines, visual art, poetry) to interpret and share what they learned over the course of their internship experience. Mentors generally enjoyed the process of helping their mentees achieve these more ambitious goals, and in some cases this independent project structure was incorporated into the internship programs set up by former mentors' organizations, or became something individual mentors focused on:

"We've used a similar format for, I think it's been a few years now. And I know things have morphed over time, but [take] their project scoping. We have our current interns create a one-page summary of what their projects can be, what their questions are, a little bit of background, and what impact it's going to have on the [community served by my organization]....So I think there were certainly some aspects of just, you know, trying to help them mold their own project and stay on track that we have definitely kept, moving forward for our internship program." —VG

"For me, just being more attentive to planning and preparation, prior to onboarding interns, is something that I'm committed to more than maybe in the past. In the past, I always had, I was focused on developing a work plan: Here's what I want done each week that you're here. But not so much focused on: 'How do I set the intern up for success?'"—SP

> "I think that approach of, like, giving interns autonomy, is something I find will be lasting at [my organization]. At least, in that area. And I think that when I'm talking with other groups around, [in my] division, there was also interest in absorbing a bit of that approach. And so I think the autonomy, and making sure that those lenses, the life experiences of interns are centered to their work at [my organization], was really important to me, and I think, is lasting. I hope it's lasting." —SE

Theme 4: True organizational change is often slow and incremental. Although we consider it a question that is fundamentally beyond the scope of this project, we had a deep curiosity about *how* change occurs within conservation organizations. We also wondered what forces might be standing in the way of change. With the exception of two interviewees from the same small nonprofit, every participant in our study confirmed that the organization they worked for while they served as a mentor was actively engaged in multiple DEI-related processes at an institutional level. Besides taking on interns from historically underrepresented groups either through DDCSP@UW, or implementing their own internship programs, as described above, the most common types of engagements we heard about were organized trainings relating to unconscious bias and/or structural inequities, and attempts to recruit and hire a more diverse staff. In other words, nearly all the conservation organizations in our sample are, we believe, making at least some explicit moves toward creating more inclusive workplaces.

Yet with irritation, resignation, or both, most participants in our study observed that institutional processes surrounding DEI are often dedicated to the realm of theory (e.g. statements and studies) rather than tangible processes, and that moving from the former to the latter is not straightforward. A few mentors noted that their organizations have a desire to publicize their partnerships with DDCSP@UW itself in ways that can feel self-serving:

> "I get frustrated by platitudes...(there have) been a lot of like written statements and things like that, and less so actionable things that people can actually change." —TC

> "Moving forward in DEI is kind of a 'fits and starts' sort of thing. And at one point… [my organization] was just getting mired, as I've seen happen a lot of places, in the 'Let's figure it out, let's get the report, let's get the background information'...because they don't know how to start." —SV

> "There's always an ask from our marketing team for pictures, and for stories, and for blog posts that go out to social media [about the work that I'm doing as it relates to BIPOC communities, including my mentorship with DDCSP@UW]... I'm really prickly about that....what's the purpose of that? Is that something they've asked for? Is that something that they want for their communities?" —NC

> "It's easy to check that box and be like, we were fortunate to host these young people [DDCSP@UW interns] and be in service to their upcoming into this world. But let's be honest, that also makes us look

> good, right? To be able to post a blog with young women, or people of color, and say, 'Look what we did!' And I hate that. … my manager is after me to publish more articles and blogs and stuff like that. And I hate doing that stuff. Because … I want to be doing it for the right reasons. And it doesn't need to be self-serving... it needs to be more meaningful to us as an organization than a blog post of them in the summer…Honestly, I think, you know, the optics [of partnering with DDCSP@UW] were great, but the lasting impact [on my organization] remains to be seen." —IW

Against this backdrop, we identified the following sub-theme: *Barriers to change at my workplace are both internal (e.g. resource limitations) and external (e.g. systemic forces).* Many interviewees named specific barriers to tangible change, including competition between DEI-related activities and the organization's "normal" mission, a failure to thoughtfully assess the effectiveness of DEI-related activities, and—troublingly—a continued lack of care for the needs of staff with marginalized identities, leading to unhappiness and poor retention. Below are indicative examples of each of these barriers as described by participants:

> "There's a lot of will and support. It's just a matter of, you know, we bill hours, right? We need to pay—every single hour has to be tracking a particular project. And so I think the biggest hurdle is it's not just the space and the time, but it's, again, finding the clients and having there be work and desire out there to be able to cover our bills in a way that we can do work that is addressing issues of DEI in the conservation realm." —DN

> "That was just one of the things that I always had trouble with was everything [DEI-related] was just on top of what your normal body of work is. Not really integrated. And it's hard to find time with the other demands that we have. … and then everyone kind of wants to push off responsibility of how do you integrate it? Or how do you build these structures? Because there's a lot of upfront investment that has to happen." —SE

> "I do think that we could really benefit from some sort of way of gauging our process year through year. Because I've been at the org for six years. And we've had enough turnover that the work I was helping out on four years ago—I don't even know that the people that are now doing the DEI work, really have the same, like they don't have that lens to compare it to. And I don't think we've had a survey year to year to year to year to look at are we stagnating anywhere? Have we flatlined anywhere?...Or, have we actually really been able to change and shift… the lens and the understanding and the awareness within staff? I don't think we have a great way currently of like, gauging… we haven't done a big questionnaire kind of this, and then looked at those answers." —MD

> "The major way of measuring success is numbers of participants, mostly....Oh, we did a program in [neighborhood]? How many people came to the program? How many, how many programs did we actually do in [neighborhood] that's related to [the] environment? And blah, blah, blah, right. So if you've done none, any is an improvement…so it's very, very basic metrics."—CE

> "We have had trans staff or nonbinary folks, or people with different orientations that were very vocal about it, and none of them currently work here anymore...they all either left or were fired for various reasons given but when you look at the pattern of behavior...we're pretty sure it's just because of who they were..."—BL

> "[Based on] things that have been shared with me from colleagues, and just the fact that we have had a lot of BIPOC staff leave, they've left in the last couple of years. And I know a lot of people have left jobs during the pandemic... but I think it's been a space that hasn't really been a safe space for a lot of BIPOC staff. And I mean, that's been communicated to me over and over." —NC

> "[I have been] challenged all the time, as a person of color. I was a supervisor, and my white colleagues, you know—and I was a peer before I became a supervisor—so once I became a supervisor, and even when I was a peer, my white colleagues did not respect me as a professional person, that my way of knowing was not as legitimate as the way they knew and taught. The underlying energy in the way that they interacted with me is that 'You are lesser than. You—we are the experts', you know. And the disrespect and, just really, the intangible ways of being mean and disrespectful? Well, I got to a point, I didn't realize that I was really depressed. And I had to seek help for that."—CE

Of note, nearly half of our interviewees said that COVID-19 had disrupted DEI-related efforts within their organizations in one way or another. SP's quote below highlights the fact that besides the practical impacts of the pandemic, the shift to remote work meant difficult conversations about race and inequity felt like they were even more intractable. We were struck by this and other acknowledgements that the process of change ultimately relies on individual human beings being willing to participate in a potentially messy exchange of ideas and perspectives, and to accept some level of (personal and/or professional) risk:

> "With COVID and like the county and my group…shifting to more remote work...that kind of collaboration and my own kind of integration and ability to show up diminished…And that's hard...when you remove one of the key ways that people communicate, for this type of area, it is harder to be more vulnerable and ask these tougher questions in a digital landscape."—SP

The key role of individuals as change-agents also shows up in the second sub-theme we identified here: *Leaders mediate the speed of organizational change.* On the one hand, this insight is entirely unsurprising; leaders hold the greatest decision-making power, have the greatest access to resources, and by design, their actions shape an organization's mission and priorities. Yet hearing this from our interviewees brought home that in order for programs like DDCSP@UW to have meaningful impacts at an organizational level, they must in some way touch people who hold leadership roles. We heard the message that at least some conservation professionals feel disempowered within their workplace hierarchies, and perceive a disconnect between their own strong desires for change, and the extent to which those who hold relatively more power are willing to act.

> “But again, my immediate cohort is pretty small. Right? And frankly, we're not decision makers at this organization. We don't have a seat at the table. And so there is, as an in any organization, kind of politics and power and all of these things that are kind of built into that.”—NC

> “...one of the things that I've also had many discussions [about] with our larger supervisor management program is how can we make our recruitment process a little more equitable. And in a large organization? I can't control HR. And it's hard. It's hard to make those impacts at that level.” —VG

> “the crucial piece…is you just gotta let—the powers that put some programs like this in place, just have to have, just step back and let go and trust and … just needing to recognize that letting go to allow for both the next generation and those who are working in this space as instructors as mentors, just let them go and let them run, beautiful things will happen. And so I think that [lack of trust is] what will hold things back. And I've experienced that in another workplace too. I mean, lack of trust, just people rebel, and there's well, and things crumble. And that's a straight up…experience out of the recent workplace as well, when leadership just had this grip on things and didn't trust really passionate people who were always going to strive to do the right thing, to do the right thing.”—DN

> “Bringing problems of equity to a female director is different than when I brought it to my previous male director. She has viewed the fact that she is the executive director and that there is a staff of all female and we're all sort of like bosses of our own department...as a success… irregardless of the fact that we're all white ladies. And so we're like, ‘No, we can do better.’ And she's like, ‘What do you mean, we're doing great? There's a woman here!’....I've actually found it a little bit more difficult to point around and be like, we're not diverse enough, when the person who was in charge thinks that we're doing great, because we're all women…The staff, I think, are wonderful. It's the upper levels that unfortunately control the majority of what happens and what goes on there that are less open-minded. But those people are of a certain generation that will be retiring very soon. I'm really holding out hope for that.” —BL

3.3 DDCSP@UW Programming:

Theme 5: The impacts of working with DDCSP@UW are strengthened because of specific practices that are not present in all internship programs. We found a broad consensus, with over 80% of our interviewees contributing to this theme, that the experience of mentoring with DDCSP@UW differed from their experiences with other internship programs in meaningful ways. The first sub-theme we identified here was: *It was more demanding to be a mentor for DDCSP@UW than other programs, but this made the experience richer for both me and my interns*. As described at the end of section 3.2, DDCSP@UW mentors are expected to co-develop projects with their interns, and several shared the challenges of what one referred to as this “big undertaking”:

> “We made sure to…have them develop their own program or own project that kind of gave them that freedom to have it be integrated, have it be multidisciplinary. Like, that socio-ecological aspect [of

DDCSP@UW] is really great. Because like other interns, typically you're hired on to help out with an existing program and maybe are … assigned a project but it is within an existing context, like, help out collecting samples for lakes, or help develop some educational videos or that type of thing, but not necessarily giving as much autonomy to those interns." —SE

"When I think about the other interns that we've had…this was much more hands on. Right, like it's a project that you're co-designing together and matching skills and interests and needs…this was way more involved and integrated and co-produced. And I've not been part of that type of educational mentoring experience or mentorship before." —IW

Universally, however, interviewees expressed how the additional demands of being a mentor for DDCSP@UW came with corresponding rewards when they looked back on what their interns had been able to do. SE, who described the experience of mentoring as "overwhelming" and noted feeling "fear and anxiousness" the day before his first interns started, also said that the joy he found in mentorship was one of the main reasons he stayed with his organization—where he had not been entirely happy—for as long as he did. He shared the pride that welled forth in him:

"We really wanted them to kind of take the lead in developing what they would be looking into…And so I really appreciated sitting down with them and extracting what are their interests in terms of both skill development and areas that they wanted to learn more about? And I guess the memory is [from] when they actually got presenting. So it was required that our interns and scholars would present at the end of it to everyone in the division, so usually there's 50 or so people that show up…and when we're introducing them and feeling a little choked up in doing so, having this sense of pride. And I don't, I haven't, I've never had that before… And then seeing them present and having to be so comprehensive and seeing the impact that I had and also the impact that others had and like, just the confidence and the presentation of what I would not have been able to do at that age. [I] just had a really warming sensation in my heart."—SE

Other interviewees shared similar sentiments, often referring to their memories of attending the annual DDCSP@UW Conservation Summit. This is an occasion at the end of the summer when interns present their reflections, lessons learned, and final internship products to mentors, alumni, and other supporters of the program.

"The greatest impression on me was sitting through the Conservation Summit. And listening to their two presentations—presentations from everybody—I was really impressed with the quality of the presentations, the originality of the presentations, and sort of the genuine nature of those…it was it was all related to their project experience, but it was, you know, in a more sort of artistic form. So more sort of poetic than matter of fact, but very personal…I just remember being captivated by just about every one of those presentations. And I shared the link with folks, and said: 'You've got to watch these! These are really impressive.'"—SP

"The thing that was most impactful…was really the Summit, at the end of the program. It was just cool to go there and hear not only what our scholar's experience was, but what all the other scholars' experiences were through other organizations. Just the impacts that that project made to those organizations, and just the zest for life and inspiration that they had to make change. The—I'm gonna get teary eyed. It was just wonderful." —VG

"I watched [the Summit] and just I mean, yeah, you know, it's like *all the feels*. And all the—you feel like you're watching your, I don't know, someone graduate from college that you have some kind of role with. And you just feel proud of them." —NC

The next sub-theme we identified was: *DDCSP@UW provided resources that set me up for success.* We asked our interviewees how they engaged with materials the program provides for mentors during the onboarding period. These include readings about mentorship and wellbeing; literature about anti-racism, justice, and equity in conservation; toolkits for creating inclusive lab, field, and workplace cultures; and resources for engaging in non-violent communication and conflict-resolution. In addition, mentors and interns are provided with structured worksheets and templates to support them in getting to know each other during their pre-summer meetings, and to facilitate the development of internship project proposals and planning. Many mentors said they found these resources helpful:

"I think the program staff have done an amazing job at creating resources…I do think that that's been a big piece of it for me, is that preparation, before we even meet our scholars, is being able to sit down and work through the questions of 'What what am I hoping to get out of the internship?' and 'What practices are in place to make sure that this is going to be successful?' and really trying to make sure we've got that, because I think again, it's just a lot of *Go, go go*. And so really having that time to relax, sit down, work through a worksheet that asks me a lot of really thoughtful questions, has been really, really beneficial for me personally, and I think for organizations to really think through, 'What are we missing? Where are we not hitting these things that can make this a better workplace for everybody, not just our scholars and interns?'" —FM

"I loved all the [training] materials. I made sure to always forward them to people that I think should read them...the wealth of knowledge that you all have is incredible...I love that they put it in a Google Drive, so I could go in and access it at any point in time. Like if I had a lull in my workday, I would go in there and read something else. I would bookmark things and email them to my colleagues—'Hey, did you see this? This is in this folder.' Like, because [colleague] is also new…and so sending that stuff to her to one, get her caught up and then two, be like, 'Oh, isn't this amazing? … we should talk about this when the summer's over… we should circle back to this'— and we have, several times."—BL

"The resources that DDCSP provides, I think those have been helpful in just learning more about DEI practices and also things like interpersonal communication, and in developing those skills… I've definitely read a few materials from DDCSP and that helped me put some things into perspective. And also just practices that can improve certain situations, even beyond mentoring—just communicating

with a person that might not be easy to communicate with—even things like that." —KH

"When those resources came up, I was sure to pay attention, because I knew there would be some more quality things for me to help improve, or kind of reset myself on, to not just engage with the scholars, but with the folks I manage, with the staff I interact with, partners. It's hard for me to pinpoint a concrete example. … I know this happened, but I can't give you the specifics…I know there were things that I learned through reading the resources or kind of thinking about it that was like, oh, you know, this, this is actually something we should bring to this space, too....Yes, you have [these DDCSP@UW-provided resources] for a specific near-term project or goal, which is to support these interns, but it does end up like sticking in your brain and ending up elsewhere, right? And I know that sounds small, but—that's how things move." —SV

"I thought the resources were great—I like templates, and so I thought the templates were really helpful, the calendars. Just probably the most valuable was just the one-on-ones with the staff, just like: This is what we've learned, this is what you might expect. That was really helpful."—IW

The final sub-theme we identified was: *DDCSP@UW creates community, and is not just an educational program.* Interviewees noted that their mentees had strong peer relationships within and between cohorts in the program, and with program staff:

"When I first [worked with a small group of first-year scholars] the four of them together had spent the whole summer together, and were just so comfortable with each other….[and] with the, second year scholar-interns that we've worked with… often we've had them lead nature walks, and they're always really excited to invite their cohort, and even sometimes invite the first-years…And so I do feel that sense of just them wanting to be with each other and wanting that support, right? … And even [names various staff members] have showed up to our walks. And I think that that really speaks to just the connection that everybody has and how beautiful it is. " —FM

"Toward the end of this season, a couple of the staffers…came out and joined us in the field one day. So it was [co-mentor] and I, our scholars, and at least two other DDCSP staffers, and that was, that was really great because that really showed to us as [organization name] that you [DDCSP@UW staff] are invested not just in the program, but in these people as individuals. So that, that made that obvious for me." —IW

"I think conservation in general we have a long way to go still— we have a long road ahead of us. And I think, the DDCSP interns have this beautiful little cohort of support. And then I feel like when they go out into the world, that, unfortunately, it's not going to be there in the conservation field as much, right? Like, it's this beautiful support place of like-minded people and like-minded backgrounds, and, and I wish we could just transform the conservation world to look more like that! Can we just make it look more like that?" —MD

About a third of participants also said they had a sense of belonging to the larger DDCSP@UW community, through connections with staff members, other mentors, and other conservation professionals that supported their professional growth:

> "I've had wonderful conversations with staff…just kind of talking through, 'What is the program trying to do? What are some of the issues or discussions or themes that are trying to be brought forward through the various experiences, and what are different ways that I could help or [my organization] could help, or other organizations?'...we haven't been able to act on everything. But that's been really wonderful and…affected some of my approach to trying to build that own sort of muscle on my team…[and] in the orientation, kind of seeing the other mentors and other organizations and kind of hearing the kind of projects they were thinking of, that was so helpful...hearing some of the different ways that mentors were thinking about supporting the interns." —SV

> "I think [staff member] invited me to a presentation by a well known healthy food advocate, a friend of his who came in, and I was invited to spend some time with them. And that was very delightful and educational, and just for networking was really, really great. And so other other things like that, being invited to other things, where I could meet other folks." —CE

> "The relationships that I've built with [staff member], and a few other people in DDCSP, I think it has also just been a support system that's been really, really valuable during the mentorship experience, but also again, just beyond that, just as a person and also just being in the conservation field and trying to do your best. And also recognizing that not everything goes perfectly. So I feel like those relationships have really just fostered a lot of confidence, and motivation." —KH

> "Getting a chance to follow up with [staff members]... and just have kind of a close out after the interns have left and *they've* had a chance to take a breath, and *I'm* taking a breath...even just a brief like 'How did it go?' — that was really important. And I do feel like I can turn to [staff members] at any time of year and talk to them about the program or concerns I'm having...I feel connected." —FM

> "What was really beneficial to me [was] feeling this sense of community around this program, through those, wrap up and maybe launch conversations with DDCSP staff… There's lots of ways that those conversations—'Oh, this is this scholar, this is what we know about them. And this is how to make this the most successful for them'—were helpful…I think it's really just sort of the family [of it]"—SE

4. Limitations to this study

Our exploratory study has several limitations. All interviews were conducted retrospectively, with large variances in both the number of times participants had mentored for DDCSP@UW, and the length of time that had passed between their most recent mentorship experience and the date of their interview. Conducting a prospective study using paired pre-mentorship and post-mentorship interviews with only new mentors could have resulted in more generalizable findings, though it would also mean the loss of our ability to understand whether and how impacts last vs. shift over time. Other important sources of

variation include interviewees' relative levels of seniority and power within their organization; the sizes, ages, and types of organizations they work for; and their demographic characteristics. Finally, we can only report on DDCSP@UW's impact on individual mentors; our ultimate interest in the potential for programs like this to trigger or facilitate change at an organizational level would require a much larger, longitudinal study involving multiple staff and leadership at each partner organization.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

Our interview data provide a unique insight into the effects that partnering with a program like DDCSP@UW to host undergraduate interns from diverse backgrounds can have on individual conservation professionals—and, to a limited extent, on the organizations they work for. We find slight to profound positive impacts on mentors' in terms of their awareness of existing inequalities in conservation, as well as their commitment to using their professional positions to increase diversity, equity, and justice within the field. Generally, these impacts arise through the personal relationships mentors develop with their interns. In addition, consistent with other studies—particularly those based on more recent models of mentorship that highlight the transformative, meaning-making potential of the mentor-mentee relationship (Block and Florczak, 2017)—we find that the experience of working with DDCSP@UW mentees provides a sense of satisfaction and pride, and can rekindle mentors' passion and joy in their work (Kennett and Lomas, 2015; Cooke et al., 2017). We also find that, inspired at least in part by these experiences, some mentors have successfully pushed for changes in workplace policies that increase equity and access. This, along with examples of conservation organizations basing aspects of their own internship programs on the DDCSP@UW structure, is the main way the program has been able to leave any marks at an organizational level. However, again consistent with other studies, we find that meaningful organizational change is slow and incremental, and requires the buy-in of individuals in leadership positions.

The DDCSP@UW program ended in 2024 as the Doris Duke Foundation's goal of supporting 10 full cohorts was met in that year. However, there remains a great deal of demand from both students and conservation organizations for these kinds of programs. Based on our findings that the positive impacts of working with DDCSP@UW are strengthened because of specific programmatic practices, we offer the following recommendations for others working in undergraduate experiential learning/internship programs with a diversity focus:

1) Be intentional about creating strong community ties among students, program staff, mentors, and alumni and supporters. We particularly encourage the use of a cohort

structure in which students go through the program as a peer group and are assigned to internships in pairs or threesomes; having a two-year timeline, as DDCSP@UW does, also provides opportunities for cross-cohort relationship-building. Another way to facilitate these ties is to have staff, and where possible, other students, make site visits to each internship location. During site visits, interns can share what they are currently working on and mentors can meet other members of the program community. We also recommend organizing a culminating event where interns share their projects, what they learned, and personal reflections on their experiences; and encourage not only mentors to attend, but also their colleagues within the host organization.

2) Require internship projects to be co-developed by interns and mentors based on both organizational needs and the individual interests of interns. Provide support, such as worksheets, templates, and pre-internship meetings, for developing these projects.

3) Provide training and resources for all mentors on the topics of antiracist and inclusive mentorship, field and workplace safety and conflict resolution, and the specific historical context of inequities within their professional field.

While most of the impacts of working with DDCSP interns and the larger program are individual in scale, these meaningful experiences have lasting value that may yet have larger programmatic impacts, and are themselves of great importance in the careers of these mentors. We are encouraged by the degree to which these mentoring experiences inspired individuals to improve their work with early career colleagues and to contribute to improvements at their workplaces. These beginnings of change are welcome and important pieces in the overall trajectory to building a truly inclusive workplace for the full diversity of conservation practitioners.

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Appendix: We worked with the following paid consultants, each of whom has extensive experience with: 1) qualitative research methodologies, and 2) working with environmental organizations to conduct organizational equity audits and plan and implement strategic DEI plans. Our consultants collaborated with each other to provide feedback on our research goals and protocols, semi-structured interview questions, and analysis methods.

Consultants: Inclusive Community; The Avarna Group; Sol y Luna Consulting.