

**PRACTICUM HANDBOOK 2018-19**

**Designed to help you plan and complete a supervised practicum.**

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE PRACTICUM**

Finding a practicum is not necessarily an easy task and can seem even more complicated when you are unsure of the exact path that you would like to take in your career. This manual is intended to help you as you work to put together your practicum. No two students take the same path in higher education, and you want to make an informed decision about all of the different options and choices available. Whether you are looking to try a different field or gain breadth of experience in your current field, a practicum can be a valuable experience.

In part, this manual is designed to be a starting point to finding a practicum. It contains resources, contacts, organizations, and other information that might be useful to you at different stages of the practicum experience. We hope that you find it informative.

The practicum experience includes the practicum itself, along with the associated course offered in the fall semester. More details of the course will be available in the fall via the course syllabus. The course will be taught by Kelly Gray, Associate Dean of Students, UMass Amherst, [gray@umass.edu](mailto:gray@umass.edu). It is scheduled to meet most Thursdays, 4-6 p.m. during the fall semester. Beginning in Fall 2014 the Practicum course will be graded rather than pass/fail.

### **Purpose of the Practicum**

The practicum provides an opportunity for you to obtain more experiential-based learning related to higher education/student affairs. Most students choose to do their practicum during the summer months although for some it is more convenient to do it at a different time. Although you are responsible for identifying your own practicum site, you will have the opportunity to discuss the practicum during the Master's Seminar courses, and you should work with your academic adviser regarding the setting and the requirements for completion. You also should take advantage of opportunities to discuss practicum possibilities with faculty members and students who have already served practica. After the practicum has been completed, there is a class in the fall that provides an opportunity to reflect upon your experiences with your classmates and an instructor.

### **Goals**

- To reinforce the value and importance of the linkage between academic and experiential learning in higher education administration.
- To help students develop skills in applying classroom learning to higher education practice.

**Texts** – best bet is to order these online. Other readings will be distributed electronically during the fall semester.

Ardoin, S. (2014). *The strategic guide to shaping your student affairs career*. Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

Stage, F.K. & Hubbard, S.M. (2012). *Linking theory to practice: case studies for working with college students*. New York: Routledge.

**Recommended Texts** – helpful to read over the summer during the internship.

Brooks, K. (2009). *You majored in what? Mapping your path from chaos to career*. New York: Plume.

Cooper, D.L., Saunders, S.A., Winston, R.B., Jr., Hirt, J.B., Creamer, D.G., & Janosik, S.M. (2002). *Learning through supervised practice in student affairs*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Practicum Handbook. (The document that you are reading.)

**Course Syllabus. Includes details of the fall course.**

### **What is a Practicum?**

Since you are thinking about a career in student affairs or higher education, it helps to have experiences in multiple areas, including those outside of your assistantship. An intensive, 120 hour experience, similar to an internship, is an excellent way to become a generalist and gain valuable experience that will help to prepare you for any career direction you choose to take.

You will need to complete a minimum of 120 hours at your practicum site. You will also need to complete:

#### **Practicum Contract**

The contract must be signed by you, your academic adviser, and your practicum supervisor BEFORE starting your practicum. The contract specifies your goals and objectives for the practicum, the minimum hours that the practicum will encompass, and the timeline in which the work will be completed. An example of a contract can be found in the assigned text (*Learning through supervised practice in student affairs*).

The contract should also include clearly specified beginning and ending dates. Although the Practicum course is taken during the fall semester, most students choose to do their practica during the summer). Spread over 10 to 15 weeks during the semester or the summer, a practicum only requires 8 to 12 hours a week, although some students exceed the minimum requirements.

**Sample contract below.**

## Sample Practicum Learning Contract

TO:

Masters Program Coordinator. Higher Program

FROM:

Student Name

PRACTICUM:

Practicum Site Location

Site Supervisor

Start & End Date

Total Hours

I. Reason(s) for selecting this particular practicum site

II. Planned learning outcomes for practicum experience

III. Outline of Practicum

- A. What will your regular responsibilities be?
- B. What are the expected outcomes/products that will be produced during this experience?
- C. What are your supervisor's expectations regarding professionalism, mentorship, and supervision?
- D. What are the intellectual competencies and practical skills that you hope to enhance through this practicum experience?
- E. How do you plan to connect knowledge based on theory, research, and assessment to your experience?

IV. Approvals

- A. Student
- B. Site Supervisor
- C. Advisor

## **Summer Journal Assignments:**

On-line assignment via Moodle. Due on a bi-weekly basis throughout the summer. This should work out to 3 journal entries, 3 to 4 pages each. You will be assigned to groups and you are expected to read and comment on the journal entries of your group members.

### Journal 1: Functional Area and Your Practicum

This journal entry focuses on your functional area (Res Life, Academic Advising, Financial Aid, etc.) and your practicum site. It should include why you chose this area and describe the department you are working in. How is your practicum site organized (mission, learning outcomes, services, staffing, budget, etc.)? Is your practicum site on par with best practices outlined in the literature?

### *Journal 2: Your Experience*

*Focus on your overall experience to date. What type of supervision are you receiving? What are your main job responsibilities? What is the work culture like? What challenges have you experienced and how have you handled those challenges? Finally, are you getting the experience you hoped for when accepting this practicum? If not, is there anything you can do to improve your experience?*

### *Journal 3:*

*Your final journal entry will not only summarize your experience, but organize how you will present your experience in future job searches. What did you learn? What did you accomplish? What skills did you develop? How did you overcome challenges? How did you work with your supervisor and colleagues?*

## **WHY HAVE PRACTICA AS PART OF THE MASTER'S PROGRAM?**

There are several reasons why internships or practica have become commonplace among undergraduate and graduate preparation programs, including the opportunity to gain more experience in a desired field, be exposed to new systems of organization, experience the link between theory and practice, and begin networking and establishing professional relationships. The CAS (Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education) standards for graduate preparation programs in student affairs recommend two distinct experiential learning situations, with the assistantships or full-time jobs counting as one such experience and a practicum counting as the other.

Your graduate assistantship or full-time work experience provides you valuable experience, however it is necessarily a limited view of higher education careers. You may retain the same assistantship or job throughout your entire graduate career, or you may remain in one field or one institutional setting. As a result, there are many other positions, schools, and organizational systems, which remain unexplored. One goal of the UMass higher education master's program is to help develop well-rounded practitioners who can draw from a variety of experiences when they enter the professional world. Practica can help you see how other departments, schools,

and systems operate differently from your own experiences thus providing you with more information on which to base potential career decisions.

Another goal of the program is to create knowledgeable and intentional practitioners in higher education. As a result, the opportunity to further link the theory that you have gained in the classroom to tangible experience in the field is a large component of a practicum. Without the opportunity to apply the knowledge that you have gained through coursework, the program only fulfills half of its mission. Practica are designed to help foster the link between theory and practice so that you are better able to see the connection between the classroom and the practical experiences of working in higher education.

The ability to draw from interactions with other professionals in different departments or institutions may provide you with valuable knowledge on how you want to approach working in the field. Through a practicum, you may find an incredible mentor who helps to guide you through your experiences and define your professional development goals. Much of the practicum experience is designed around mentoring and fostering learning from contact with other professionals in the field. Exposure to different working styles within higher education and the opportunity to create professional relationships with future colleagues are important components of the practicum experience.

#### **How can I make the most out of my practicum experience?**

Deciding on the position and institution you want to pursue for your practicum can be difficult, especially with so many choices available. The first thing you will probably want to figure out is the area in which you want to gain more experience.

#### **Do you want to gain more experience within your area of specialization?**

Perhaps you would like to explore a more specific area within your specialization. For example, if you work in Residence Life, you may want to gain more experience in planning and implementing programs.

#### **Do you want to gain experience outside of your current area of specialization?**

What other areas of higher education are you interested in? Consider researching areas of higher education that interest you and then look for a practicum that is geared towards that area.

#### **Do you want experience in a different type of institution or in a different geographic area?**

Additionally, consider your own higher education background in terms of where you have worked or been educated. Public or private? Size? Student population? Geographic region?

If you have lots of experience with large, public institutions, why not look for a practicum in a small, private institution? The depth and quality of experiences that you can gain now will only help you to further define your philosophy of higher education, as well as the type of institution in which you wish to work in the future.

No matter which general direction you choose for a practicum, you will gain valuable experience working in an area different from your current assistantship or job and be exposed to new ideas, new styles of supervision, and new ways of working with students.

### **Paid or Unpaid?**

You should also consider whether or not the position is paid or unpaid. If you already have a source of income from your full-time job or other assistantship, you could consider taking an unpaid practicum. Often better opportunities arise if you volunteer. This decision is clearly a personal decision.

### **SHOULD I CONSIDER WAIVING THE PRACTICUM?**

If you already have had at least five years of professional work experience in higher education, you might want to waive the 120-hour practicum experience (but you cannot waive the practicum course). However, before requesting a waiver, think about the opportunities that a practicum has to offer regarding work experience in an area that is new for you.

You should discuss the decision to request a waiver with your advisor. To formally request a waiver you will need to write a one-page statement describing your professional experience – usually you will also want to include a resume. Submit your request for a waiver to your adviser who will then present the request to the faculty who will vote on whether to approve your request or not.

### **WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR SETTING UP A PRACTICUM?**

Although the higher education faculty and your academic adviser certainly will advise you in your search for a practicum, finding a practicum is your responsibility. The process generally begins with a discussion of practica opportunities in Prosem I during the first fall semester. Students who are interested in participating in one of the national practicum programs (such as ACHUO-I) must begin the process toward the end of the fall semester.

Some organizations begin their application process as early as December with placement decisions in February, and some do not begin accepting applications until late January. Because the exact dates and timeline changes from year to year for each organization, it is best to search their websites for updated information. Mid-November is a good time to start inquiring about this process. Students must contact these organizations directly.

In the spring, students will continue to discuss practicum opportunities. When you find a practicum site you will need to write the contract and have it signed by your adviser and the site supervisor. Over the summer you will complete your three journal papers and reading Ardoin (2014) before (or during) your practicum will help you in your practicum and assist you in writing your summer journals. You will be registered for the fall practicum course during the spring registration period. Registration will be handled through the higher education program faculty because the course requires permission (meaning you cannot register yourself through SPIRE.)

During the spring semester, students should meet with their advisers to discuss their options for choosing practicum sites. A partial list of organizations is provided below.

### **National Organizations with Practicum Options**

ACUHO-I: Association of College and University Housing Officers – International  
<http://www.acuho-i.org/EventsbrPrograms/HousingInternshipbrProgram/tabid/620/Default.aspx>

This organization sponsors housing and residence life internships both in the U.S. and abroad. The experiences range from planning residence life training and programming to working with summer conferences. Its timeline is one of the earliest, with applications due near the beginning of January.

ACPA: Association of College Personnel Administrators

<http://www2.myacpa.org/career-development/graduate-preparation/>

This organization sponsors internships in its national office in Washington, DC. The internships involve working with the national office to plan a variety of conferences, as well as manage the day-to-day aspects of a national organization for student affairs.

NODA: National Orientation Directors Association

[http://noda.orgsync.com/about\\_internships](http://noda.orgsync.com/about_internships)

This organization sponsors internships nationally with schools that have programs for new students. Practica involve working with orientation programs during the summer and planning for new student orientation in the fall.

Other organizations might offer opportunities for practica, without having an organized system. Some potential websites to check out include the following:

National Association of Campus Activities - <http://www.naca.org>

Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education - <http://www.naspa.org>

National Panhellenic Conference - <https://www.npcwomen.org/>

North American Interfraternity Conference - <http://www.nicindy.org/>

### **Previous Practica Sites**

Over the years, students have had many practicum experiences at a variety of different institutions and in several different functional areas. Here is just a sampling...

Assumption College - Career Services

Bard College – Dean of Students, Student Activities

Boston University - Tanglewood Institute, Conference Coordination

Bowling Green State University - Residence Life

Brown University - Programs Marketing Manager

Colgate University - Development/Institutional Advancement

Dean College - Orientation Office

General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church

Hampshire College - Dean of Students

Lehigh University - Orientation Office

Marquette University - Residence Life

MIT/Wellesley - Upward Bound

Mount Holyoke College - Career Services, Res Life



New Hampshire College - Student Activities

Northeastern University - Career Services

Northern Arizona University - Orientation, Transition, and Retention Services

Otterbein College - Center for Community Engagement

Rhode Island School of Design – International and New Student Orientation Program

Sam Houston University - Residence Life

Smith College - Leadership Development

Springfield Tech. Community College - Women in Transition Advising

UC San Diego - Office of Student Research and Information

University of Essex - Residence Life (UK)

UMass Amherst

- Advising, College of Humanities and Fine Arts
- Center for Teaching
- Dean of Students Office
- Donor Relations/Development
- International Programs Office
- New England Conference for Student Success, College of Social & Behavioral Sciences
- New Students Program
- Office of Academic Planning & Assessment
- Office of Institutional Research
- Student Bridges
- Student Success, College of Humanities and Fine Arts

Washington University - Diversity Initiative

Westfield State University – Orientation

Wentworth Institute of Technology – Orientation Programs

### **WHAT SUPERVISORS WANT FROM YOU**

Here are things that supervisors are looking for from students doing practica in their organizations. These standards can be used as a basis for evaluating the performance of practicum students.

#### Primary Standards

- Basic understanding of department, including: operations, function, philosophy, issues, programs, and relationships
- Degree of involvement and participation
- Open and regular communication and dialogue with supervisor

- Satisfactory completion of activities outlined in objectives, including practicum requirements
- Professional commitment and seriousness of purpose
- Professional judgment
- Sensitive and effective interpersonal relationships

#### Secondary Standards

- Ability to take initiative and assume responsibility, including leading or co-leading projects
- Ability to objectively evaluate experiences
- Organizational ability
- Knowledge and understanding of higher educational and organizational behavior
- Sensitivity to ethical considerations
- Dependability
- Ability to work independently
- Ability to express ideas verbally and in writing

#### **WHAT PRACTICUM STUDENTS WANT FROM THEIR SUPERVISORS**

Practicum students have identified what they would ideally like to see from their supervisors.

- Demonstrate perceptiveness, concern, and support for personal and professional development of practicum student
- Set aside sufficient time for discussion, clarification, information, and advising
- Maintain professional trust, sharing of real and significant information, regular, open, honest, and direct communication
- Assist in identifying worthy, relevant, and reasonable objectives
- Provide ongoing encouragement and evaluation of performance in terms of objectives, process, and outcomes
- Discuss underlying philosophical and organizational relationships of the internship and office/institution, including exposure to relevant literature and resource material
- Provide guided freedom and give direction when necessary
- Involve the practicum student actively in as many areas of the organization as possible
- Provide exposure to and explanation of administrative options
- Establish, clarify, and relate expectations for performance
- Serve as a role model
- Provide opportunities for feedback to the supervisor
- Commit to the educational goal of the practicum
- Understand the limitations of the practicum and of the student

## **Managing Your Supervisor**

Taken from *Managing Up!*, by Michael and Deborah Singer Dobson, these qualities and actions can help you to better manage the ongoing relationship that you develop with your supervisor at your practicum site, as well as your colleagues.

### **Do Good Work**

- Review your job description and try to exceed your performance standards
- Set aside time each day for long-term efforts and projects
- Ask for feedback and use it to experiment with different approaches
- Set and work out a plan to achieve personal and professional development

### **Be Supportive, Not Competitive**

- Be a team player, not a team competitor
- Get involved in the office/institution, in order to network and find support among institutional constituents

### **Choose Your Battles**

- Make sure you are attuned to your boss' goals and expectations in order to avoid unnecessary conflict
- Learn how to negotiate like a pro by listening carefully and researching the issue
- Keep your word, so as to avoid conflict with those depending on you
- Accept responsibility when you have made a mistake. Find a way to rectify the mistake (if a solution can be found), or a way to avoid repeating it in the future

### **Develop Strong Communication Skills**

- Take your job seriously but yourself lightly
- Learn how to provide clarity in confusing situations, ask open-ended questions, and remain neutral in conflicts
- Prepare and provide constructive feedback for both those you supervise and those who supervise you
- Learn how to say "no"

### **Buyer Beware!**

- Know the politics of the department and the limits of your own position's power
- Contain your own discriminatory beliefs and attitudes, including: racism, sexism, misanthropy, classism, homophobia and xenophobia
- Recognize cultural and other differences in attitudes, behaviors and communication styles

## **COMMON PRACTICUM PROBLEMS**

It often is difficult to navigate working with one or more supervisors, as well as others in the department. Not every experience is ideal and you may run into several issues during the course of your practicum. Here are some common problems:

- Unclear expectations

- Too many assigned responsibilities
- Too few assigned responsibilities
- Little knowledge of departmental or campus culture and/or politics
- Misstep or mistake that seems irreparable
- Multiple supervisors with different styles
- Assigned tasks in which you don't feel confident or comfortable

All of these problems can be fixed with only one solution – better communication between you and your supervisor. Be assertive, polite, and willing to talk about the issue in a professional way. If a problem does develop, go straight to the person with whom the problem is most directly relevant. If the problem is not with your supervisor, you might want to talk with him/her first about some potential strategies around confrontation and resolution before you proceed. Always, always, be diplomatic in any situation or approach. If a problem persists and you cannot seem to resolve it on your own, contact your faculty adviser.

### **A QUICK WORD ABOUT ETHICS**

The issue of ethics is a tricky subject when talking about practica. Every institution, department, and individual has different ideas about what is professional and what is ethical. It is important to be clear with your supervisor about his/her expectations of you at the very beginning of your experience. There have been unfortunate incidents of individuals being asked to leave their practica as a result of unclear expectations and/or poorly made decisions.

If you are going to be in a practicum situation in which you work closely with students, get clarity about your boundary lines from the very beginning. This is one of the best ways to familiarize yourself with the culture of the institution and department, as well as the approach to professionalism that your supervisor takes. It is always better to err on the side of caution than to have to defend yourself and your decisions or actions to someone else. Use your best judgment in all situations.

## **Professional Development Assignments (Fall Semester)**

**60-Second Commercial:** Prepare a 45 to 60 second commercial answering 4 questions. Who are you? Where have you been? What have you been doing? Where are you going? No handouts or media, just you! Focus on your points of pride and tangible results. This is excellent practice for networking or a job interview!

**Case Study Groups:** Class will be divided into 4 groups, each group responsible for presenting one of the assigned cases and facilitating an activity for the rest of the class. Group will be graded on organization, communication, and ability to recognize and teach key points of the assigned case.

**Case Study Paper:** You will pick one of the Case Studies in Stage & Hubbard (one not used in the group assignment) and analyze it using the framework provided in Chapter 1. After your analysis, you will make a final decision(s) and explain how you would implement the decision and how you would respond to those that don't agree with your decision. This paper should be 3 pages, use appropriate sources, and be in APA format.

**Informational Interviews:** Select two professional staff (or faculty) who currently hold a job of interest. This cannot be someone who you are already directly working with (supervisor or colleague). This is an opportunity to learn from someone who works in Higher Ed. You should be prepared to ask 5 to 7 questions about this person's professional journey. In addition, use this opportunity to ask for advice about your career development and find out what skills and experiences are important. For each meeting, you will write a follow-up reflection paper. Paper should be 3 pages and in APA format.

**Final Written Exam (20 pts):** You will be provided a mock job description and five interview questions in the beginning of November. You will think about these questions in relation to your own experience - your current job/assistantship, your practicum, your education, etc. – and craft written answers to these questions. Each question will be approximately 2 pages in length. Additionally, you will submit a copy of your resume (geared toward the job description) an appendix to your paper. Eight pages total and APA format. References not needed, unless it is relevant to the answer of your question. For example, my supervision philosophy is modeled after Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support (1968).

**Final Interview:** During the last class on December 7th, you will participate in a mock interview for the same job used in your written exam. You will answer three interview questions and will be scored based by the interview team-based on the content of your answers and your communication skills.