

# M.A. Practicum Handbook - Students 7C:333

Student Development in Postsecondary Education  
<http://www.education.uiowa.edu/sdp>

Graduate Programs in Student Affairs  
Department of Counseling, Rehabilitation,  
and Student Development  
The University of Iowa

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## INTRODUCTION

This handbook is intended to serve as a resource for the completion of the Student Services Practicum. Herein you will find descriptions of practicum and practicum seminar requirements, policies, administrative procedures, suggestions for making the most of your practicum experience, and practicum requirements. As a Practicum student, you will be held accountable for the material included in this handbook. We know, however, the handbook cannot anticipate or answer every possible question regarding the Student Services Practicum; please do not hesitate to contact the Practicum instructors: Fall 2009: Deb Liddell; Spring 2010: Becki Elkins, for additional information.

## PRACTICUM REQUIREMENTS

### *Rationale*

The M.A. program in Student Development in Postsecondary Education (SDP) requires experiential coursework in the form of practica and internships. These requirements are, in part, mandated by accreditation. The SDP program meets the accreditation standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) for graduate programs in student affairs. These standards are carried out in a number of ways, including the development and implementation of the curriculum; interactions and relationships between students and faculty and among students; the staffing of the graduate program; and through what CACREP calls “clinical instruction,” or, in our case, an experiential curriculum.

Practica and internships also are required because of the Graduate Programs in Student Affairs (GPSA) faculty’s strong commitment to provide both in-class and out-of-class professional development experiences for our students. We believe that supervised experiential learning, including practica and internships, are necessary to add breadth and depth to your development as a student affairs professional. Practical experiences obtained as a part of an M.A. program in Student Development should include developmental work with individual students; program planning, implementation, and evaluation; administration and supervision; exposure to diverse clientele; use of assessment and evaluation tools; familiarity with electronic technologies for communication and teaching; and the application of ethical guidelines. Specific outcomes to be achieved in the SDP practicum are described in Appendix A of this handbook.

In the following sections, guidelines for finding a practicum site and fulfilling your practicum requirements are described in the form of responses to “frequently asked questions” about practica.

### **How many credit hours and clock hours are needed to fulfill the practicum requirement?**

Each SDP master’s student must complete a minimum of 3 semester hours (or 112.5 clock hours) of practicum – this is equivalent to about 7.5 hours for 15 weeks. This requirement must be met prior to registering for an internship (see the SDP M.A. curriculum information or the SDP internship handbook for internship requirements). Most SDP master’s students fulfill the practicum requirement by registering for 7C:333 (Practicum in Student Services) for 3 credits during the second semester of their first year in the SDP program. In addition to spending 7.5 hours per week at the practicum site, students attend the practicum seminar, as it is scheduled. Of the 112.5 clock hours, at least 40% must be devoted to “direct service” to or with students. Examples of direct service include staffing a front desk for walk-in traffic, meeting with student organizations, implementing an educational program, or meeting one-on-one with a student on career or academic issues. In addition, weekly individual supervision meetings with the practicum site supervisor are required.

### **What are the prerequisites for the practicum experience?**

A minimum of 3 semester hours of Microcounseling (7C:278) must be taken before, or concurrent with, 7C:333 (Practicum in Student Services). These requirements may be waived by the faculty if appropriate. In addition, the placement must be approved by the supervising faculty. This approval will be based on the faculty member’s knowledge of the student’s readiness to work with students, and the appropriateness of the match between the site and the student.

### **What are the requirements for a practicum site supervisor?**

Minimum CACREP standards for a practicum site supervisor are a master’s degree and 2 years of

professional experience in student affairs work, as well as knowledge of, and commitment to fulfilling, the expectations of the SDP practicum experience. In addition, the SDP program requires that the ACPA and NASPA Ethical Guidelines are followed in the practicum setting. The supervising faculty will be available to the site supervisor for consultation as needed; site visits also will be arranged for the faculty and site supervisors to meet during the practicum experience. In addition, the site supervisor must complete a written end-of-term evaluation of your work (see Appendix C).

### **How many practica may I complete?**

One 3-credit practicum is required for MA students, although students may enroll in 6 semester hours of additional – or “advanced” – practicum credit; the course number for Advanced Practicum also is 7C:333. If, after the first practicum is completed, you wish to have an additional practicum experience, you may request to do so, but the advanced practicum must differ substantially from the first. You may, for example, complete an Advanced Practicum in an office different from that in which you conducted your first practicum experience, or you may take on a new role and new responsibilities in the same office in which you did your first practicum.

A total of 9 experiential credits may count toward your degree requirements; this includes practicum in student services (7C333) as well as practicum in college teaching (7C380).

### **May I use previous experience or coursework to fulfill the practicum requirement?**

Because CACREP and the SDP program set high standards for all components of practica and internships, transfer courses and professional experiences are acceptable as substitutes only if they meet or exceed these minimum program requirements and are approved by the SDP faculty. If your previous professional activities are deemed by the SDP faculty to meet standards for practicum credit, a waiver for the practicum course will be granted. However, the minimum semester-hour requirement for your degree will not be reduced. If you feel that transfer credit should be given, University of Iowa courses substituted, or waivers granted, discuss the situation with your advisor.

### **How and when should I select a practicum site?**

All students who will enroll in 7C:333 in Spring 2009 are expected to participate in a “Practicum Orientation” session in the fall; you may begin to contact potential practicum sites after that session. If you are interested in pursuing an advanced practicum, you should plan to begin your search no later than the middle of the semester prior to that in which you plan to enroll in Advanced Practicum.

Selecting an appropriate practicum site depends on a number of factors: In what sort of institution – small college, community college, large university – would you like to gain experience? With what clientele do you want to work? Do you have fairly specific career interests or are you interested in “trying on” a number of possible endeavors? What sorts of skills do you want or need to gain? Do you want to develop a particular area of expertise, or are you interested in gaining a range of skills and knowledge? Your answers to these – and other – questions will influence the practicum placement you decide to pursue.

You will receive information about potential practicum sites at the October “Practicum Orientation” session; you also may develop a new practicum site (information about doing so follows this section). If you are uncertain about the nature of an agency or the duties involved, consider talking to the faculty practicum supervisor, your academic advisor, and/or the agency contact person to find out what kinds of activities and services you might expect. Current M.A. students also might provide useful information about their own practicum experiences, but keep in mind that every student’s needs and interests are different, and practicum sites change over time; past experiences are not always a good predictor of future experiences.

Once you have decided which sites are of interest to you, contact the sites and arrange an appointment for an interview with the supervising professional. In most cases, your first contact with a site should be a phone call or email, followed by a resume and cover letter describing your interest in a practicum, the skills you would bring to the site, and the skills and knowledge you wish to develop during the practicum experience. The staff at the Educational Placement Office, 302 Lindquist Center (phone: 335-5353), can consult with you regarding the development of a resume and cover letter. Helpful literature is available in the office, and they will critique resumes by appointment or on a drop-in basis.

You will receive information from the GPSA faculty to share with prospective practicum site supervisors as part of the interview process. Please provide this information in advance of your interview so the prospective supervisors will have a good idea of what kinds of responsibilities they will have if they agree to work with you as a practicum student.

Interviews for practicum and advanced practicum experiences should be treated as professional interviews. Professional attire is appropriate and you should prepare thoroughly for the interview. There is no prescribed format for a practicum site interview, but, at a minimum, you should expect to address: (1) what you hope to gain from a practicum at that particular site, (2) what you might contribute to the site, (3) expectations and opportunities the site and/or supervisor have for a practicum student, and (4) the extent to which the site is able to meet the needs and requirements of a practicum student. This means you should have done your homework about the site, your interests, your strengths, and your challenges.

Before the end of the semester prior to the one in which you plan to do a practicum, you should have a commitment for a practicum site and you should know:

- the training and orientation expected prior to the practicum,
- your starting date,
- the number of hours expected of you per week,
- who your site supervisor will be, and
- the process and criteria for your evaluation.

#### **Do I need a formal agreement with the practicum site?**

You will need to obtain the signature of your practicum site supervisor on a "Verification of Practicum" form (see Appendix B) and present the form to Deb Liddell, the practicum faculty supervisor, no later than the last week of the semester prior to the one in which you will be a practicum student. This form will serve as a formal agreement between you and the site supervisor that you will work as a practicum student at that site.

#### **How can I develop a new student services practicum site?**

New practicum settings become available on a regular basis, often at the request of students seeking participation in an area of student affairs work of special interest to them. If you have a suggestion for a new site, or want to explore creating a practicum in a site that has not had an student affairs practicum student, please contact Deb Liddell, the practicum faculty supervisor.

#### **What is the role of practicum faculty?**

All experiences associated with 7C:333 – both in-class and out-of-class – are coordinated and supervised by GPSA faculty. These faculty work with students to obtain practicum sites, assist practicum site supervisors as needed, meet with students and site supervisors during the course, plan and implement the Spring practicum seminar, and evaluate all practicum students.

#### **What is the purpose of the practicum seminar?**

The practicum seminar is designed as a student-centered learning experience which integrates previous and concurrent classroom learning with the on-site practicum experience. The content and requirements of the seminar will vary according to the priorities of the faculty and students involved, but each is intended as a group supervision experience. Seminar activities could, for example, include a focus on some or all of the following educational outcomes:

- A professional orientation to student affairs work
- Application of theories to practice
- Familiarity with current local institutional issues that affect practical experiences
- Familiarity with current national issues related to student development
- Individual and group problem solving skills
- Knowledge and understanding of the role of student service agencies in the institution, and for the fulfillment of the institutional mission.
- Reflection on out-of-class learning.

The seminars meet once per week; attendance is required, and expectations for this course are no different than for other graduate courses. Please refer to the appropriate Schedule of Courses for the time and place of your practicum seminar. The seminar faculty will consider your completion of the practicum

site requirements and seminar requirements, as well as the evaluation of your site supervisor, in determining your grade for the course.

**How should I keep track of my hours?**

Students are expected to keep track of their practicum hours and activities; your site supervisor might have a particular format for noting hours. The "Verification of Completed Practicum" form (see Appendix D) should be completed at the end of your practicum semester. Your practicum site supervisor will use the form to verify you have completed the hours necessary for the practicum.

**How is the practicum graded?**

At the end of the semester, your faculty practicum supervisor will schedule a meeting with you and your - site supervisor for the purpose of summative evaluation. Prior to this meeting, you and your site supervisor should meet to discuss his or her evaluation of your performance in the practicum (see Appendix C). Your final grade is based on the combined strength of your on-site supervisor's evaluation, your faculty advisor's performance assessment, and your work in the seminar.

**How can I get the most from the practicum?**

A large part of your responsibility as a practicum student is to become actively engaged in your own learning at the practicum site. Get to know your supervisor and the other staff members, familiarize yourself with pertinent literature, and prepare to develop the competencies and skills that would be required of an entry-level professional at your site.

Professional standards and ethical conduct are expected of you. Confidentiality must be observed when dealing with students and in other appropriate situations. Also, you are expected to participate in the normal routines and customary practices of the office, even if they sometimes seem mundane.

One of the first requirements of your practicum is the development – with your site and faculty supervisors – of goals and objectives for your practicum experience. Your goals should identify and describe the outcomes you desire as a result of your practicum; the objectives will identify the strategies you will use to accomplish your goals, including the tasks you will perform, your time commitment and work schedule, work area (i.e. desk, office space, and resources for your use), lines of reporting and authority, relevant reading, and meeting times with your on-site supervisor. The practicum faculty will provide information about how to set appropriate and useful practicum goals. At midterm, you and your supervisor should review your goals and objectives and assess your progress toward achieving them.

Regular meetings with your site supervisor also are important for making the most of your experience. They give you an opportunity to ask questions about the office and the tasks at hand, establish or redefine your role and objectives, and/or discuss problems. Meetings are also a way for your site supervisor to inform you about professional concerns and opportunities.

**What is the difference between a practicum and an internship?**

In general, the practicum is the introductory experience to student affairs professional work and is designed to provide a safe environment to help you explore and develop professional skills and a professional orientation. You should begin to learn about applying student affairs theory to practice, problem solving skills, and local/national issues confronting the profession. The practicum is usually unpaid, usually completed in one semester, and requires that students take Microcounseling (7C:278) concurrently or prior to enrollment in the practicum seminar (7C:333). [The University of Iowa prohibits the acquisition of University pay for an experience which accrues academic credit.]

The SDP MA internship is one component of 7C:363 Capstone in Student Services I and II, a two-semester course for second-year SDP MA students. The purpose of the internship is to add depth to your professional experience and facilitate your development as a professional. This includes developing leadership skills, job search techniques, and professional identity. The SDP internship requirement is determined by CACREP guidelines for clinical supervision: each intern must complete 600 clock hours at the internship site. Most SDP MA students complete their internship hours in their second-year graduate assistantship. Pre-requisites for Capstone and internship include the successful completion of (1) 3 semester hours of 7C:333 and (2) Multiculturalism in the Helping Professions (7C:250).

**Is a summer practicum possible?**

The first practicum experience – your first 3 semester hours of 7C:333 – must be completed in the spring semester of your first year in the SDP MA program. Some SDP MA students have accumulated hours toward an advanced practicum in the summer between their first and second years in the program, but only when an adjunct GPSA faculty member has been available to serve as a supervisor. Full-time GPSA faculty are on 9-month academic contracts, so typically are not available for summer practicum supervision.

## APPENDIX A

### Practicum in Student Services – Professional Competencies

The following skills, knowledge, and behaviors are desired educational outcomes of the SDP Practicum in Student Services:

#### I. Communication Skills

- Demonstrates effective written communication skills (e.g., papers, memoranda, email, reports).
- Demonstrates effective spoken communication skills (e.g., proper grammar and usage, uses language appropriate to professional settings, uses language appropriate to audience) .
- Demonstrates appropriate nonverbal communication (e.g., uses appropriate body language).

#### II. Interpersonal Skills

- Demonstrates empathy, tact, and sensitivity toward others with whom she/he interacts.
- Acknowledges and appreciates different perspectives.
- Gives and receives feedback responsibly (e.g., in a timely manner, directly (rather than indirectly), assertively (rather than aggressively)).
- Forms effective and appropriate relationships with colleagues and students.
- Is flexible and patient (e.g., keeps an open mind, copes effectively with change and ambiguity, responds appropriately to needs and requirements of others, deals with frustration in a professional manner).
- Shows empathy, acceptance and concern for all students with whom she/he works (e.g., does not 'play favorites,' responds effectively and appropriately regardless of personal preferences or opinions).

#### III. Understanding of Work

- Demonstrates willingness to learn.
- Carries out job responsibilities effectively.
- Can work autonomously or as part of a team as situations require.
- Transfers skills to new settings or projects effectively.

#### IV. Professional Work Habits

- Conducts herself or himself in a professional and ethical manner; demonstrates integrity.
- Responds appropriately and professionally to supervision (e.g., works without supervision as appropriate, implements suggestions and requests of supervisor willingly).
- Demonstrates initiative when, and as, appropriate.
- Follows through on commitments; meets deadlines.
- Takes responsibility for the consequences of actions, choices, and mistakes.
- Effectively manages time and priorities.

#### V. Understanding of Self

- Exhibits accurate and appropriate self-knowledge (e.g., aware of culture, biases, strengths, limitations, effects on others).
- Demonstrates commitment to his or her own professional development and continued learning (e.g., seeks assistance to address areas in need of improvement; addresses personal obstacles to professional effectiveness).
- Asks for assistance and/or support when needed; recognizes own limits.

**APPENDIX B**

Practicum in Student Services – Verification of Practicum Site

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) requires students in certified programs to complete at least one supervised practicum. This form documents the agreement to a practicum site and supervision between the following student and site supervisor:

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Term of Practicum: \_\_\_\_\_

Site/Agency Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Site/Agency Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Description of Practicum: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor's Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's Signature Date

*Return, signed by all parties, to the supervising faculty.*

**APPENDIX C**

## Practicum in Student Services – Student Evaluation

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

Practicum Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates of the practicum experience: \_\_\_\_\_

<i>Please circle the appropriate response.</i>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Does Not Apply/No Opportunity to Observe
Communicates effectively in writing.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Communicates effectively in speaking.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Demonstrates commitment to own professional development.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Acknowledges and appreciates different perspectives.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Demonstrates tact, sensitivity, and empathy in interactions with others.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Gives feedback responsibly.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Receives feedback responsibly.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Forms effective and appropriate relationships with colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Forms effective and appropriate relationships with students.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Demonstrates willingness to learn.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Carries out job responsibilities effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Can work autonomously or as part of a team as situations require.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO

<i>Please circle the appropriate response.</i>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Does Not Apply/No Opportunity to Observe
Transfers skills to new settings or projects effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Conducts himself or herself in a professional manner.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Responds appropriately to supervision.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Follows through on commitments and expectations in a timely fashion.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Takes responsibility for the consequences of own actions.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Manages time effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Asks for help when needed.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO
Takes initiative as appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5	NA/NO

In general, how would you rate the student's effectiveness as a practicum student in your office? (circle comment that is most accurate)

1 Poor Did not meet minimum expectations	2 Below Average	3 Average	4 Above average	5 Excellent Among the best
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Please elaborate on any of the above ratings as needed:

In what areas did you see the student learn, improve, and/or develop skills and knowledge?

In what areas should the student strive to improve?

Other comments:

What, if any, recommendations do you have for the GPSA faculty regarding the practicum experience/course?

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Site Supervisor's Name                      Signature                      Date

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Student's Name                      Signature                      Date

*Return, signed by all parties, to the supervising faculty.*

**APPENDIX D**

Practicum in Student Services – Verification of Completed Practicum

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) requires students in certified programs to complete at least one supervised practicum. This form documents the satisfactory completion of a practicum by the following student:

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Term of Practicum: \_\_\_\_\_

Site/Agency Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Site/Agency Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Description of Practicum: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor's Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's Signature Date

*Return, signed by all parties, to the supervising faculty.*