PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICUM (PSY 495/496 – 3 credit Hours)
Department Of Psychology (Dr. Scott Debb)

Practicum Overview  (for Students and Practicum site supervisors)

Following includes information about the general purpose and limitations of practicum, creating a training site, supervisor and student responsibilities, and general requirement information for non-clinical training sites.

The goal of this undergraduate level practicum is to provide students with a structured experience to introduce them to an environment where basic psychological principles are being applied. Under direct supervision of the practicum site supervisor or his/her designee(s), student may have the opportunity to apply their knowledge of psychology and the skills acquired in the classroom in some capacity. After completing all required psychology courses in their academic program, the practicum experience is one of two culminating milestones before earning your B.A. in Psychology at NSU (the other being the Psychology Seminar capstone course).

Practicum will place you in a professional environment, under supervision, for at least 128 hours (roughly 8 hours per week for 16 weeks). Scheduling of hours is at the practicum site’s discretion so long as they make every effort to get you 128 total. Weekly hours can be accumulated in any combination of days and hours, although 8 hours per week spread across one or two days is usually optimal. Students who desire additional hours may request this to their site supervisor, who will decide the feasibility and appropriateness of the request. There is no maximum on the number of hours you accumulate, and if you intend to reference your practicum experience to potential employers of on graduate school applications, you should strongly consider asking your practicum site to schedule you for 10-20 hours per week. The practicum process is designed to match students with direct training experiences that meets their needs and interests, while also satisfying the needs of the site. Like a volunteer position, practicum is unpaid and you should not be receiving compensation for your services, although practicum is different than volunteering and you should treat it as you would any other employer. Training sites should not be placing you in ethical gray-areas where they are using you in place of a licensed clinician, and then seemingly billing as if the licensed person has done the work. Report any suspected concerns to your NSU Practicum Coordinator immediately!

Specific learning outcomes will be unique to each individual depending on their practicum placement. Students may take up to two semesters of practicum; however, unless otherwise specified in the “Practicum Contract”, the practicum experience is intended to cover one 16 week academic semester. Students wishing to complete two semesters must register for the course twice, complete all course activities for both semester, and may choose the same or different training sites. Being allowed back at the same site is at the discretion of the site supervisor.
Practicum sites vary widely in terms of populations served, overall mission, and type of experiences offered. In general, students are expected to be able to:

- Recognize and/or apply specific psychological principles in the service delivery at an agency;
- Understand and practice the sensitivity required in serving diverse populations;
- Understand and practice appropriate interpersonal skills including verbal/non-verbal communication & dress;
- Maintain a professional demeanor (i.e. attire, punctuality, ethical practice);

For Students & Practicum Site Supervisors:

**Students should NOT be providing direct (unsupervised) therapy/billable services** (for example, anything normally requiring a clinician with a license or specialized training)! **Students have not been trained** and are **generally not qualified in any advanced capacity and their fieldwork is likely minimal or negligible.** Should a student be qualified by virtue of their vocation/job title/credentials (outside of NSU or this course), the site is encouraged to contact the NSU Psychology Practicum Coordinator before assigning work that may fall within an ethical gray area. Students can provide other services on behalf of the site at the discretion of the site supervisor.

For practicum sites that are NOT psychology, counseling, social work, or mental health-oriented:

Students ARE allowed to have non-clinical practicum placements. This can include settings that are education related (schools, mentoring, disability services, athletics—but not as an athlete), research oriented (working in a research lab or institute, working under the supervision of a faculty member developing or administering a research study), medical (this should have some logical connection to psychology and CANNOT consist of administrative tasks in physician’s office), career-counseling, or other PRE-APPROVED placement (contact the NSU Practicum Coordinator ahead of time to determine eligibility). In addition to the ethics codes indicated above, students may be expected to comply with HIPAA (health care), FERPA (Education), or any of the several other ethics requirements promulgated by specific clinical fields.

**PREREQUISITES:** Students in this practicum course should be seniors or other upper-level psychology majors in good academic standing (minimum 2.0 GPA). Exceptions MAY be made for non-psychology majors or those who do not meet the above criteria. Residency in the local Hampton Roads area is **NOT** a requirement; however, you may find it more difficult to find a placement since the Psychology Department at NSU has limited
relationships outside of the Hampton Roads area. Please note that the Psychology Department will provide a list of possible practicum sites, but it is the student’s responsibility to obtain a practicum placement.

You ARE allowed to create your own training site! The above noted list includes many sites that previous students have obtained (and your new created site will go into this database for future students!).

Instructions for creating a new site: Complete the New Site approval form and submit it to the NSU Practicum Coordinator. Upon approval, the practicum site (supervisor) must agree to the ‘Practicum Contract’ and itemize anticipated responsibilities for the student. Students and/or practicum supervisors must contact the Psychology Practicum Coordinator at NSU with any questions BEFORE starting, to avoid potential problems. Failure to do this could impact the student’s final grade in the course!

Other prerequisites include having earned at least a C or better in PSY 210/211 (Introductory Psychology series), PSY 270 (Statistics), and PSY360 (Research Methods). PSY280 (Abnormal Psychology) is highly recommended as well. Some exceptions may be made on a case by case basis (such as for non-psychology majors), non-seniors, military servicemen/women, or transfer students. Comparable statistics and research methods courses from non-psychology departments are acceptable with prior approval. Students entering into a research-based practicum should have completed PSY270 & PSY360 in good standing. NOTE that the practicum experience (at the training site) is a single component of the NSU Practicum course, and students must complete all training site hours in addition to their work in the Practicum course (administered via virtual classroom with weekly assignments and deliverables).

General criteria for the Practicum Site:
- It will provide logistic support to the student;
- It will attempt to match goals and learning objectives of the course for the educational needs of the student;
- It will provide appropriate clinically-oriented supervision: individual or group, to be run by the site supervisor or an appropriate designee (such as an graduate student intern or senior staff);
- It will provide an opportunity to experience a real-world job situation, providing opportunities to apply psychological knowledge when appropriate;
- It will provide diverse experiences that allow the student to experience multiple facets of the practicum site.
- Agree to and sign the Practicum Contract;
- Provide the student with an orientation to the culture and mission of the site, and relevant job duties;
- Create a consistent schedule that meets the needs of the site and taking the student’s schedule into account;
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- Sign all student paperwork required for the Practicum course at Norfolk State University;
- Provide the student with consistent, relevant, and timely feedback;
- Communicate with the NSU Practicum Coordinator directly regarding any major issues with the student.

General criteria for the Practicum Coordinator / Course Instructor:
- Identify students who are ready to begin practicum;
- Discuss educational and practicum needs with students and practicum supervisors;
- Help establish realistic goals and objectives for the practicum experience;
- Communicate as needed with the student and practicum supervisor;
- Provides feedback and direction to the student as needed;
- Engage in dispute management/resolution if conflict should arise between the student and practicum site.

General criteria for the Student:
- Reviews the educational goals and objectives of the practicum;
- Checks email and Blackboard (BB) daily for any pertinent messages or updates;
- Completes practicum assignments as assigned;
- Completes course assignments in a timely fashion;
- Fulfills the requisite number of hours required at the practicum site, including supervision;
- Communicates with the faculty advisor (preferably via email) about practicum;
- Adheres to all components of the course syllabus;
- Coordinates with the practicum supervisor to complete and sign all paperwork;
- Behave in a professional manner, adhering to all applicable privacy and ethical standards.

Expectations of Training Sites

Clinical/Psychological; Mental Health; Counseling (including support services such as case management):

1. Students should NOT be assigned direct “billable” services (please do not exploit the student or bill for services provided by a student that are intended to be provided by a licensed clinician or a professional with advanced skills that the student has not demonstrated an adequate proficiency);
2. Students ARE allowed to interact with clients/patients, assuming proper supervision by training site personnel;
3. Students should be exposed to privacy and confidentiality rules (HIPAA), and appropriate ethics code(s). Students without this awareness may consult their textbook, but the training site is responsible for recognizing this deficiency and developing a plan to help the student;

4. Supervision can be provided by anyone who is licensed, graduate students who are being supervised by a licensed person, or other competent and qualified individuals. Group or individual supervision are both acceptable. Note that students wishing to use this practicum experience for specific credentialing purposes may require supervision to be conducted by a licensed clinician, and may require additional documentation outside of NSU and this course.

5. Students can do administrative work, but paperwork and filing should NOT be their primary tasks. Administrative work that is clinical in nature (e.g., case management, logistics, medical chart review) is appropriate, but engaging in janitorial services (for example) is not.

6. Students should not be exposed to hazardous or toxic conditions. While safety is never fully guaranteed, especially in the field or in the presence of individuals with mental disturbance, precautions should be taken to not place students—who are at the start of their training—in environments where they are likely to be injured. Please disclose all risks to the student ahead of time!

Medical Settings:
The same expectations as indicated above for clinical/psychologically oriented sites generally apply here as well. Additionally, in medical settings, the training site may have needs that do not fully meet that of the student’s (unless the student states an interest in health psychology, neuro-psychology, or psychiatry), and the site should ensure this issue is investigated before accepting students. For example, managing the phones for a general practitioner’s office would likely yield little gain in experience related to psychology. Working in a physical therapist’s office may allow for interpersonal skill development, but unless the role specifically incorporates a psychological or mental health component, the student’s training needs will not be met appropriately. Medically-based training sites, especially those situated within private practices, should contact the NSU Practicum Coordinator prior to working with a student.

Education/School/Career/Disability/Correctional/Other Community-based:
The same expectations as indicated above for clinical, although FERPA may also apply in addition to HIPAA. Students placed in primary or secondary schools should have communication between staff at the
School/college/university where the student is placed with and the site supervisor (if different). Community-based sites (such as shelters, senior centers, places of worship) should ensure that students are qualified to engage in activities assigned. Additionally, sites where minors are present or where students are otherwise likely to find themselves in a dual role situation (e.g., working at a college counseling center and seeing their friend walk into the office for a mental health assessment) should seek additional guidance about this. Correctional settings and community-based outreach or social service organizations may have additional layers of oversight. Many of these types of sites also require a background check and possible drug testing.

Research:
Sites/supervisors should be conducting research studies using real data, or working on research developing such programming. Interviewing and running focus groups is acceptable assuming students are trained, at the responsibility of the training site. Data analysis is acceptable assuming the site supervisor feels the student’s abilities in this area are adequate given their incoming level of preparedness. Students should NOT be involved in classroom activities consistent with that of a graduate teaching assistant.

Other (including predominantly administrative):
Administrative work should be directly applicable to clinical/mental health/research/etc. The nature of the administrative tasks must be specific and applicable. Any site that is primarily administrative (such as working within a corporate office) may be very applicable to the student’s training needs, but site supervisors and students are encouraged to work with the NSU practicum coordinator ahead of time to ensure the appropriateness of anticipated assigned tasks.

As the NSU Psychology Practicum Coordinator, I am committed to ensuring that students receive a relevant training experience. I believe in diverse training environments and goals and I am comfortable with creativity in getting students the preparedness they need to be marketable graduate school or (entry level) job candidates.

Direct all inquiries to Dr. Scott Debb, Psychology Practicum Coordinator; smdebb@nsu.edu / 757-823-8943