

Practicum FAQs for Supervisors

I. General Questions

- **What exactly *is* the community social psychology practicum?**
The Practicum is a capstone experience within the UMass Lowell Master's Program in Community Social Psychology. Students work closely with an agency to develop targeted community psychology competencies. The formal goals of the practicum are: 1) to allow students to apply, integrate, and evaluate the information and skills they have acquired in their masters-level academic course work; and 2) to gain new understandings and competencies as community social psychologists while contributing to a field setting.
- **What are community psychology competencies?**
The competencies considered critical to work as an applied community psychologist include: community assessment & program evaluation, program planning & development, resource development, advocacy & public policy, and community organizing & coalition building. We also expect students to develop the ability to apply theory to applied experiences, enhance their interpersonal & group process skills, and forward their general professional development.
- **How many hours are students expected to devote to their field work?**
Students are required to devote a minimum of 300 hours during the course of the school year at a community organization of their choosing. This can be accomplished by working 10-12 hours each week over the course of the academic year. Students are not required to work over university vacations or holidays, however, they are also not prohibited from doing so.
- **What is the timeline for the practicum?**
The class, and consequently the field placement work, begins in the Fall semester and finishes at the end of the Spring semester. The first week of field work officially begins on the first week of Fall classes.
- **How is the practicum course itself organized?**
The practicum course in which all students enroll is separated into two parts. The first part is the class, which meets once a week on campus. The second part (and the bulk of the experience) is the supervised field work in which students will apply the skills and knowledge gained as part of the Community Social Psychology program. All students in the CSP Master's Degree program are required to complete the practicum in order to graduate.

III. Expectations of Supervisors

- **Who can serve as a supervisor?**
The supervisor is a member of the organization that will host the practicum student. This person will be the one to whom students will report and who will devote at least one hour a week to their direct supervision. The supervisor does not have to be the director of the organization and does not need to have any predetermined licensing or

credentials. S/he does, however, need to have a depth of experience in the skills that the student hopes to learn. The supervisor should also be someone that students could/would not normally have contact with in their academic work (i.e. not a university faculty member) and someone with whom there is no conflict of interest or dual-role relationship.

- **What are expectations of supervisors?**
 - to provide at least one hour of individual supervision per week
 - to do bi-annual evaluations of student progress toward the student's learning goals
 - to meet with the practicum instructor three times during the year (typically twice on the UMass Lowell campus and once at the practicum site) and to participate in additional meetings as deemed necessary by supervisor or practicum instructor
 - to provide guidance geared both at directing the specific project tasks and also at the student's professional development in a more holistic manner
 - to ensure organizational commitment to support the practicum project and learning goals of the student

- **What do the meetings with the practicum instructor entail?**

There are three meetings per year for practicum supervisors, more if an individual placement warrants the additional interaction. The first meeting is held in September and is an orientation for all practicum supervisors together at UMass Lowell. At this meeting, the practicum guidelines and philosophy are discussed, and many questions are answered. The second meeting takes place during the academic year at the practicum site. The instructor, the supervisor, and the student discuss the projects and how the experience is progressing. The final meeting is held in May, again on campus for all supervisors and students. The practicum year is reflected upon and experiences shared.

- **What is the process for evaluating students?**

There are two formal reviews of the student's practicum experience during the academic year. The first is due by mid-December and the second, which includes the work during the second term and an overall evaluation, is due in May. Both students and supervisors are asked to reflect on the student's progress toward her/his learning goals, to share their individual perceptions with one another, and to provide a written summary to the practicum instructor. The format for the evaluation will be distributed in class and is also available on the practicum website.

III. Nature of the Students' Work

- **What types of projects are appropriate for practicum students?**

Community social psychology students are interested in developing interventions that are broader than individual level/clinical approaches - i.e., prevention and/or empowerment focused. They should be engaged in work that involves some student initiative (i.e., beyond being an extra pair of hands & or doing technical work like data entry). It is ideal when they have the opportunity to work with multiple relevant constituencies (e.g., consumers, clients, organization staff, and workers) and engage in projects that are directly based in the community.

- **Since our agency provides services directly to individuals, how would a community psychology practicum student help us with our work if they are not providing one-on-one services?**

There are many ways a community psychology practicum student can contribute meaningfully to your organization. Because Community Psychologists study how service providers function within specific communities, neighborhoods and society in general, a practicum student could help a great deal by identifying obstacles and supports to your work within this larger context. Also, community psychologists are skillful in examining how people in an organization can evaluate their programs and use the information gained to apply for grant funding, improve services and/or further develop the program. We can help with networking, sustainability and expanding your vision to include prevention alongside your treatment approaches. These are but a few of the many ways a practicum student can be an asset to your agency.

- **Can students get paid for their work?**
Students cannot accept any form of payment for their practicum work.
- **If I need extra services and I am willing to contract the practicum student for paid work in addition to their practicum work, can I do this?**
While the student is with you as a practicum student, the work is unpaid and the student should work according to her/his practicum contract and no other. The relationship of a paid employee to her/his supervisor differs from that of a student as in the latter case the supervisor is supporting and guiding the student toward mastery of various competencies and is the beneficiary of reflective practices often not feasible for paid employees.
- **Can students be hired into my organization?**
Once the student has finished the practicum class and, in most cases, graduated, they are often very interested as well as available for paid employment with your organization. These arrangements nearly always work well for everyone, as people at the organization and the student know each other and the work.