

Practicum Overview
Graduate Program in Community Social Psychology
University of Massachusetts Lowell

The Practicum is a capstone experience within the UMass Lowell Master's Program in Community Social Psychology. The primary purpose of the Practicum is two-fold: 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. Students participate in community placements for 10-12 hours per week as well as attend an on-campus seminar designed to support their applied work (150 hours per semester).

Placement criteria:

A. Relationship to Student Goals

- A match between the student's career goals and the objectives for the practicum
- Tasks and skills that are unique and separate from any paid employment
- The development of new skills or significant enhancement of existing skills (e.g., requiring skills that are different from other jobs/roles the student has held previously)
- The development of competencies in at least two skill areas specified by the psychology master's program as central to the role of a community-social psychologist (i.e., community assessment & program evaluation, program planning & development, resource development, advocacy & public policy, and community organizing & coalition building)
- Attention to participant conceptualizer, interpersonal & group process skills, and general professional development

B. Nature of the work

- Interventions that are broader than individual level/clinical approaches (i.e., need to be prevention and/or empowerment focused)
- Work that involves some student initiative (i.e., beyond being an extra pair of hands & or doing technical work like data entry)
- Contact with multiple relevant constituencies (e.g., consumers, clients, organization staff, workers) with opportunities to see life from the perspective of community members
- Work that is based in the community (broadly defined) that the practicum project is designed to serve
 - If the overall placement has links within the university but serves the local community, the daily work of the practicum should be based in the community outside the university.
 - If the community of interest most relevant to the student's professional development is the academic setting (e.g., student affairs, residence life), then the "community" can be defined as an institution of higher education (students, faculty, staff).
 - If the practicum project is focused on change within an organization (e.g., organization development), it should involve contact with different constituency groups throughout the organization.
- Some sort of "presence" within the organization
 - If an organization has its own physical space, this would mean having a physical location for daily work as well as invitations to participate in central organizational events, meetings, and informal gatherings.

- With coalitions or collaboratives that do not have a single physical location, there should be some ways for students to participate and contribute to coalition-related activities beyond formal coalition meetings. These might include (but not be limited to) participation in the coalition-related activities of a particular coalition member organization or group.
- Students should not receive any wage or salary compensation for the practicum work

C. Supervisor & Organizational Commitment

- Commitment by on-site supervisor to provide at least one hour of individual supervision per week
- Supervisor commitment to do bi-annual evaluations of student progress toward the student's learning goals
- Supervisor commitment to meet with the practicum instructor three times during the year (typically twice on the UML campus and once at the practicum site) and to participate in additional meetings as deemed necessary by supervisor or practicum instructor
- Supervisor commitment to provide guidance geared both at directing the specific project tasks but also at the student's professional development in a more holistic manner
- Organizational commitment to support the practicum project and learning goals of the student
- Practicum supervisor who is someone that students could/would not normally have contact with in their academic work (i.e. not a university faculty member)
- Practicum supervisor with whom there is no conflict of interest or dual-role relationship

Community Psychology Practicum Competencies

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

Develop competencies in data collection, analysis and interpretation, and in the use of information to describe and assess the interaction of persons, settings, programs, systems and social structures and their implications for the issue or program under study. The development of these competencies should be sensitive to cultural and diversity issues.

Examples:

- Understand the use of social action research that can clarify social problems, expand current definitions of what constitutes a social problem and sensitize others to the need for change
- Document ongoing practices, strengths, and resources of the community.
- Analyze community/organizational problems.
- Develop/conduct surveys, focus groups, and interviews.
- Develop evaluation and assessment designs.
- Identify program goals and objectives upon which to base evaluations of effectiveness
- Incorporate appropriate strategies for assessing both expected and unexpected consequences/outcomes
- Understand how instruments are developed and used to measure program effectiveness, community or client satisfaction with programs, etc.
- Collect and analyze evaluation and assessment data and formulate empirically supportable conclusions.
- Write evaluation and/or needs assessment reports, with appropriately formulated action recommendations.
- Develop the oral and writing skills needed to present evaluation outcomes and to foster adoption of recommendations

INTERVENTION/PROGRAM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Develop multiple intervention skills and become familiar with multiple modalities for bringing about change. The student should be able to determine levels of intervention and to select, use, and adapt appropriate strategies for assisting the setting in fulfilling its mission. The student should be able to determine how interventions can be designed, implemented, and managed for a specific context.

Examples:

- Integrate theory and research findings to shape the development of programs
- Facilitate strategic planning and implementation.
- Translate goals into specific community and organizational plans and programs.
- Develop the ability to involve others in these interventions.
- Design and implement community or organizational interventions.
- Identify and modify approaches and strategies to tailor to specific communities or populations
- Manage ongoing program details.
- Understand the role of formative evaluations in monitoring and modifying programs once they are implemented
- Strengthen awareness of the ethical implications of various intervention strategies
- Develop consultation skills to draw upon multiple sources of expertise, within and outside the setting, to identify needs that can be addressed, strategies that can be employed, and resources that can be obtained.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Learn varied approaches to helping community-based groups and organizations access the resources they need to do their work. Learn how to develop a wide range of resources such as financial support, credibility, visibility, and community connections.

Examples:

- Identify and pursue fund-raising opportunities.
- Identify and pursue grant opportunities.
- Identify and pursue sponsorships and/or for-profit opportunities.
- Strengthen connections with governmental and political entities that can support change efforts.
- Contribute to public relations efforts.
- Develop a social marketing campaign (including make effective use of mass media to promote awareness)

ADVOCACY & PUBLIC POLICY

Develop skills to influence policy at the organizational, local, state and/or national levels.

Examples:

- Become familiar with current public policy issues and debates that might have impact on the program/issue.
- Summarize research findings that are relevant to current policy discussions.
- Translate theories and research findings into useful information for policy makers, clients, organizations, citizens.
- Establish personal relationships and communicate with policy makers and community leaders through conversations, consultations, briefs, and lobbying.
- Act as a liaison or lobbyist for government planners and legislators representing social action issues, community priorities, etc.

- Participate in the legislative process.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING & COALITION BUILDING

Develop competencies for bringing varied constituencies together to accomplish shared social justice goals.

Examples:

- Develop and maintain a network of constructive work partnerships with clients, communities, organizations, and other involved professions.
- Identify and pursue avenues for collaborations with others, including members of constituencies to be served.
- Develop innovative methods for utilizing setting personnel, neighborhood groups, political networks, interagency contacts, etc. for developing programs and building commitment to their success.
- Negotiate and mediate between different stakeholder groups around a particular issue.
- Help organize coalitions of concerned/impacted citizens.
- Assist members of a community to take sustained collective action in order to gain the power to improve conditions affecting their community.
- Promote community sustainability, self-sufficiency, and empowerment.
- Assist in community leadership development.

PARTICIPANT CONCEPTUALIZING

Participate in and observe the setting and its various activities, events and programs. Apply community and systems theories – e.g., ecological paradigm, multi-levelled analyses – to understand the individual, organizational, and community phenomena observed.

Examples:

- Obtain information from diverse levels of the setting, from those whom the setting is designed to serve, and from various databases or sources (both formal and informal) to understand the community and social needs that the setting is designed to address
- Identify and describe the organizational structure, major functions and activities of the setting, how they fit with the setting's mission and how they are viewed by the populations served
- Determine the basic values, historical perspectives, goals, assumptions, and strengths within the setting and identify the connections to one's own prior assumptions/values
- Describe the informal structure of the organization and the interactions between the different sub-groups within and served by the setting (including the major networks, interdependencies, and power structures within the setting).
- Describe relations and interconnections between this setting and the larger social-political-historical context in which it exists

INTERPERSONAL AND GROUP PROCESS SKILLS

Develop process skills needed for effective intervention at multiple levels, i.e., with individuals, groups, organizations, and community-based groups.

Examples:

- Utilize effective interpersonal communication skills such as active listening, paraphrasing, reframing, challenging, summarizing, etc.
- Facilitate meetings.
- Ensure that a wide range of people are engaged in decision making and can debate in a safe environment.
- Display sensitivity and mindfulness to diversity issues
- Deal constructively with conflict.

- Provide conflict analysis and assist with resolution.
- Facilitate consensus-building processes.
- Facilitate organizational problem-solving and decision-making.
- Work collaboratively with colleagues in goal setting, decision-making, and implementing plans.

GENERAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Identify one's own unique professional development needs and be willing to work outside one's comfort zone to strive for personal and professional growth. Adopt approaches that enable life-long, continuous self improvement and enhanced personal and professional effectiveness.

Examples:

- Relate to constituency/clients/colleagues in a manner that conveys respect, professionalism, and integrity.
- Work with people of gender, classes, and ethnic backgrounds different from one's own.
- Develop public speaking skills.
- Learn how to write for varied audiences .
- Express one's feelings, beliefs, and commitments clearly.
- Be dependable in carrying out assignments.
- Adapt to the changing demands of varied situations.
- Enhance one's ability to think critically about social issues.
- Accept feedback and use it constructively.
- Identify one's own personal and professional needs and establish ways to continue one's learning process.