

UWF –Psychology Program, Counseling Concentration

Practicum (PCO 6946) and Internship (PCO 6948) in Mental Health Counseling: Essential Information for Students and Supervisors (Rev. 8 /2020)

Placement in a practicum usually represents the first step out of the role of student and into the role of a counselor-in-training and mental health professional. The Counseling Track faculty bears responsibility for assuring that the student is adequately prepared prior to being permitted to take this step. Thus, the decision to authorize a student to apply for a practicum position and register for practicum hours requires careful consideration of the student's previous performance in the training program.

In order to apply for permission to begin practicum, the student must have successfully completed 18 semester hours of graduate study which qualify as credit toward the requirements for graduation. These must include the specific courses listed as pre-requisites for practicum. Thus, a student ordinarily will not apply for permission to begin practicum until at least the 4th semester in the program. In addition, the student's most recent faculty evaluation must clearly indicate a level of performance (e.g., academic performance, professional conduct, emotional maturity) that is consistent with what is typically required by clinical sites and the program upon entering the applied practicum stage of graduate training.

The practicum course is designed to provide the graduate student in counseling psychology his or her first practical experience with mental health counseling in an applied setting. The practicum is regarded as the first step toward eventual independent practice of providing mental health services. It serves as the arena for the practical application of theories and concepts of counseling that the student has learned in previous coursework. The student is assigned to a community mental health agency which provides counseling services, and participates in the provision of services under the direct supervision of an experienced mental health professional in that agency. The emphasis of this experience is on development of clinical skills in interviewing, assessment, and mental health counseling of individuals, groups, and families.

The student is expected to spend approximately 10-15 hours per week at the practicum site performing counseling-related duties assigned by the site supervisor. These may include conducting assessment and counseling sessions with clients of the agency; conducting co-therapy with experienced staff members as they work with individuals, couples or groups; participating in case conferences and meetings; participating in weekly one hour supervision sessions with the supervisor; and completing any record keeping and case management duties required in a responsible, professional, and timely fashion. The on-site presence of the supervisor or other staff person is required when the student is performing assigned duties. The supervisor should arrange for coverage by other experienced staff if unable to meet with the student during their regularly scheduled supervision hour. Under normal circumstances, the time spent at the practicum site should involve at least half of the time devoted to direct client contact. Over the course of the semester, the practicum experience will provide the student with a *minimum* of 150 on-site hours of training, and a *minimum* of 40 direct client contact hours. No more than 200 on-site hours accrued during the practicum semester may count toward the 1000 on-site hours needed for program completion.

In addition to the above practicum site responsibilities, the student is expected to attend the scheduled class on campus each week, as well as regularly scheduled individual supervision sessions with the course instructor. The class will be conducted as a peer group supervision session in which case material, including audio/video recordings of counseling sessions (where applicable), will be presented and discussed in the context of assigned readings and topics on practical applications of counseling. The case material will serve to illustrate these applications. Whenever possible, the student will be expected to record (audio and/or video) counseling sessions on a regular basis for supervision by the on-site supervisor, the course instructor,

and the student's peers in group supervision. This is considered to be an essential, required component of the course for the purpose of promoting more effective self-evaluation by the student, as well as generating constructive feedback for the student's professional development. It should be clearly understood that such discussions are conducted with the strictest confidentiality, in compliance with policy and regulations of the practicum site, in compliance with applicable professional ethical standards, and in compliance with applicable law.

The internship is intended to be an extension of the practicum experience, as the student expands the amount of time spent on-site (typically between 24 and 40 hours per week) and continues involvement in the range of clinical activities of the practicum. The intern will again receive a minimum of one hour of individual supervision per week from the site supervisor. In addition to the above internship responsibilities, the student is expected to attend the scheduled class on campus each week, as well as regularly scheduled individual supervision sessions with the course instructor. Over the course of two internship semesters, the experience should provide the student with a minimum of 850 contact hours of training, in addition to the 150 hours obtained during practicum. Students typically remain at their training site for 3 semesters (1 year, beginning in May through the following April). At least 1000 on-site hours (minimum 280 direct client contact hours) must be accrued and documented for successful completion of the UWF Counseling Psychology program, which is consistent with Florida requirements for pre-degree training hours as a licensed mental health counselor.

Additional information. The *Practicum-Internship Application* form must be completed by the student and submitted to the Coordinator of the Counseling Track at least 4 weeks prior to the start of the semester in which the student intends to begin the practicum - this confirms the training agreement between the parties. All preliminary arrangements (e.g. student contact & interview, notification of acceptance by site supervisor) must be completed and the site approved prior to registration for internship hours in any semester. In order to be covered by liability insurance, the student must be registered for practicum or internship prior to starting or continuing with any activities at the placement site.

At the end of each semester, the practicum or internship student will be evaluated by the site supervisor on development of counseling skills and professional behavior (using the *Practicum/Internship Student Counselor Evaluation Form*). The site supervisor will review this evaluation with the student and send the written evaluation to the Counseling Track Coordinator or to the course instructor. This evaluation will be part of the material used by the course instructor to assign a grade for the course, and the evaluation will become part of the student's permanent record in the department. The student will also complete an evaluation of the placement site when training is nearing completion and is encouraged to discuss this evaluation with the site supervisor. The student's evaluation of the site will also be reviewed by the course instructor and program coordinator.

Each supervisor who provides supervision of a student for at least 300 contact hours is eligible to receive a Certificate of Participation issued by the University of West Florida. This certificate entitles the supervisor to an exemption from the matriculation fee for up to six hours during one term of instruction at any state university. Although the matriculation fee will be waived, the holder of the certificate, which is non-transferable, will be required to pay all other applicable fees at the time of registration. Issuance of this certificate will follow documentation of at least 300 on-site hours performed by the student through the *Practicum/Internship Student Counselor Evaluation Form* to be completed by the site supervisor at the end of each semester. This form is critical in that it formalizes the number of hours the student completes at their practicum/internship site, and verifies the actual number of supervision hours. Interested supervisors should contact the Coordinator of the counseling program for more information.