

**National Council of Schools and Programs in Professional Psychology (NCSPP)
Practicum Guidelines
Draft Document Approved at the 2009 Midwinter Conference**

Background/History

In 2006, the American Psychological Association (APA) Council of Representatives announced a new policy regarding supervised training (Hatcher, 2006; Williams-Nickelson, 2008). This has multiple implications for graduate programs, particularly for practicum training. In response, the Practicum Guidelines Task Force, under the auspices of the NCSPP Clinical Training Committee, developed these recommended guidelines. These guidelines are intended to be inclusive and encourage creativity as well as innovation.

General Principles

Practicum is

...the first set of supervised practical training experiences in the sequence of professional training in psychology and is designed to meet the training goals of the graduate program. The practicum comprises all supervised pre-internship¹ training experiences conducted under the auspices of the graduate program in settings providing professional psychological services^{2,3}. The practicum promotes the integration of academic knowledge with practical experience, and prepares the student for future training in professional psychology, particularly for the internship that follows. On practicum, students apply and extend the knowledge, skills and attitudes learned in the program's didactic and classroom-based experiential components to produce increasingly sophisticated levels of understanding and skill (CCTC Practicum Workgroup, 2007).

The goal of practicum training is to develop professional competencies necessary for entry-level practice into professional psychology upon graduation. Graduate programs utilize diverse educational/training methods to achieve student competence. We recognize that the number of training hours alone is not indicative of the quality of the training provided.

Practicum training is organized and developmental in nature. It consists of properly administered, planned, structured, sequential, and professionally-supervised training experiences. Practicum training is further characterized by appropriate depth, breadth, duration, frequency, and intensity. This process involves student integration of academic knowledge, professional attitudes, and professional skills. Institutionally, this process

¹ Pre-internship comprises all training experiences sanctioned by the graduate program that occur before the formal predoctoral internship.

² This definition incorporates supervised pre-internship experiences that some graduate programs call assistantships or externships.

³ Services include: assessment, treatment, consultation, management and administration, supervision, advocacy, education, program development, and evaluation. Service recipients may include individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

requires oversight by graduate training programs to ensure coordination with activities at practicum training sites, as well as appropriate evaluation of trainee performance.

Oversight of Practicum Training

1. Students are academically prepared and deemed otherwise suitable for their practicum site by the graduate program prior to beginning and during the practicum experience.
2. Graduate programs identify and monitor individual students' training needs.
3. Practicum experiences are consistent with the training needs of the students.
4. Graduate programs establish written agreements with each practicum site that include site, program, and student responsibilities.
5. Graduate programs establish written policies governing practicum.
 - a. Graduate programs disseminate these policies to all students and provide opportunities to discuss and clarify them.
 - b. Graduate programs also disseminate these policies to all practicum supervisors and keep supervisors apprised of current program policies relative to the practicum experience.
6. Graduate programs maintain consistent contact with practicum sites.
 - a. Telephone, e-mail, conference calls, and other media are possible means of communication.
 - b. Frequency of contact increases when necessary.
 - c. A practicum coordinator, or qualified designee, meets with practicum sites.
7. Graduate programs approve practicum sites that are consistent with their program mission and goals.
8. Appropriately-trained program faculty lead complementary practicum seminars or have other methods of integrating classroom and experiential material. Content of these experiences is consistent with the graduate program's goals.

Practicum Structure

1. Practicum hours are accumulated during the graduate course of study and prior to beginning the pre-doctoral internship.
2. Timing and sequencing of practicum hours are consistent with the program's training goals and the development of student competencies.
3. A minimum of 25% of the program's required practicum hours are accumulated in "direct service" (e.g., 25% represents 375 hours if there are 1500 required hours). Sites may choose to involve students in more than 25% of direct service hours. The proportion of practicum hours spent in direct service should be developmentally appropriate and consistent with training goals.
 - a. Direct service hours are defined as:
 - i. service when the client is present (this includes family members, broadly defined, participating in service; case conferences; or, treatment planning when the client is present), and
 - ii. direct contact with caretakers or persons responsible for implementing interventions.

- b. The proportion of the direct service hours are developmentally appropriate and considered in the context of the program's training model.
- 4. The remaining practicum hours consist of other forms of training and service activities (e.g., organizational consultation, report writing, record review, directed readings, didactic training, program development, research, and teaching).
- 5. Practicum should not occur at a student's place of current employment unless the practicum is clearly identified and structured as a separate training experience.
- 6. If a practicum placement provides a stipend or expense reimbursement it is clearly delineated as such.
- 7. A variety of practice settings can be appropriate practicum sites if they are conducive to clients' needs and consistent with the graduate program's training goals.

Evaluation

- 1. The graduate program is responsible for the construction of evaluation measures consistent with its program model.
- 2. Practicum supervisors provide formal written student evaluations to the graduate program at least twice per year.
- 3. Practicum supervisors' written evaluation of students assesses professional competency as well as documents hours of service.
- 4. Practicum supervisor feedback regarding professional development and competence is provided to practicum students.
- 5. Program faculty review work samples from students (with appropriate redaction or consent) as part of students' evaluation of competence. The frequency work samples are reviewed is determined by the graduate program and consistent with training goals.
- 6. Practicum student feedback of practicum experiences is solicited.
- 7. Use of evaluative feedback for graduate program development is encouraged.

Supervision

- 1. Practicum students are provided appropriate quantity and quality of supervision for the practicum experience.
- 2. Practicum supervision considers each student's developmental needs, including:
 - a. level of practicum training,
 - b. level of ability,
 - c. individual professional goals,
 - d. previous experience, and
 - e. difficulty of tasks being assigned.
- 3. Practicum supervisors are responsible for regular and routine supervision with each practicum student.
- 4. Practicum supervision is focused on and consistent with training goals, including:
 - a. discussion of clinically-oriented services (e.g., case discussion),
 - b. discussion of administrative issues/tasks, and
 - c. discussion of professional developmental issues (e.g., self-care).

5. Practicum supervisors assign students to appropriate practicum activities that are commensurate with each student's developmental level and subject to flexible variation over the course of the practicum placement.
6. The graduate program is responsible for documenting the qualifications of supervisors. Qualification may be demonstrated through a variety of methods including: specific training, experience, or coursework in supervision.
7. Of all accumulated practicum hours at least 10% are supervision hours (e.g., 150 supervision hours is recommended for 1500 accumulated hours of practicum).
 - a. At least half of the required practicum supervision hours must be met in individual, face-to-face supervision with the supervisor.
 - i. Face-to-face may be defined by individual jurisdictions (e.g., video conferencing may be allowed to encourage service access in rural communities).
 - ii. Face-to-face supervision is conducted in-person whenever possible.
 - b. The remaining required practicum supervision hours may be met in either individual or group supervision.
8. Of all required practicum supervision hours:
 - a. At least one-half is with a licensed psychologist in individual supervision.
 - b. The remaining hours may be with an appropriately certified or licensed allied mental health professional or a supervised trainee (see below).
 - c. Supervision of practicum students by psychology predoctoral interns and postdoctoral residents, under the supervision of a licensed psychologist, is encouraged.
 - d. Training provided by non-psychologist professionals is encouraged, when consistent with the training goals of the practicum experience.
9. The practicum supervisor, or qualified designee, must be available for urgent situations at all times that a practicum student is engaged in direct service.
10. Practicum sites are encouraged to provide multiple supervision experiences from different supervisors and in different formats (e.g., individual, group, live supervision, or review of recorded session material).

References

Hatcher, R. (2006). New prominence of practicum training in professional psychology: A guide for practicum supervisors and trainers. *The Register Report, Fall*, 36-42.

Williams-Nickelson, C. (2008). *Outcome of the commission on education and training leading to licensure in psychology: Impact and implication for students and new psychologists*. American Psychological Association. Retrieved July 9, 2008 from <http://www.apa.org>.