THE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE
Student Affairs Administration, Educational Administration
Michigan State University

Introduction

The Practicum component of the Master's degree in Student Affairs Administration is designed to give students the opportunity to relate and apply theory to practice. Students can gain insight into the nature of the organization, assess applications of student learning and development theory, observe different administrative styles and further enhance their professional philosophy of student affairs and higher education administration. Perhaps most importantly, practicum offers students an opportunity to practice professional behavior in a work setting. The extent to which students become actively involved in the development of specific skills varies by placement. Most Practicum placements include a "hands-on" project; however, in some settings the emphasis is more an observation and analysis than actual service delivery. Students should be clear about how the level of engagement affects their learning and seek to negotiate a placement with the elements that are essential to them. All practicum placements are centralized through the Coordinator.

Selection and Placement

Students will be introduced to the purposes of practicum during the Professional Development Seminar (EAD 893), in Fall of their entering year. During that same semester students will begin meeting with their Advisor and the Practicum Coordinator to discuss placement preferences. While actual placements are made semester-by-semester, it is important that students develop in advance a "plan" for the experiences they wish to pursue and discuss this plan with their Advisor. Some students wish to gain experience that will specifically strengthen their background in an already determined area of emphasis; others may want experiences that will supplement related fields of study; while still others may choose to explore areas where they have little or no background. Fundamentally, however, it is not the specific functional area but the opportunity to work in a professional setting and develop general professional competencies that is at the core of the Practicum. At least one Practicum placement must be in a student affairs area.

Arrangements for a Practicum are initiated with the Practicum Coordinator. A number of placement sites are fairly standard and will readily accept students each semester. Other sites can be developed, but students must begin well in advance for assignment to these sites. Arrangements for all Practica should be underway several weeks in advance of the start date.

Every effort will be made to place students in the Practicum of their choice. Some offices may, however, have more students interested in being involved than can be accommodated. Others may require that a student bring to the placement specific interests and abilities. Clarifying opportunities and expectations prior to the time a placement is finalized is invaluable to both the student and the supervisor. Before a placement is finalized a student will be expected to meet with the Supervisor to clarify the goals of the experience and to assess whether the placement is possible and desirable. Confirmation of the placement rests with the Practicum Coordinator, and must be confirmed by submission of the Student Supervisor Agreement Form.

Not all offices offer placements each semester during the academic year and only limited opportunities are available during the summer semester. Many summer opportunities revolve around the nationally-based internships which have been established through ACPA, ACUHO-I, and NODA. Students may also wish to develop their own placement in a location convenient to them during summer. These
plans should be discussed with the Placement Coordinator, preferably early in Spring Semester.

In determining practicum placements, priority will be given to those students who are nearing completion of their programs and who need a practicum to fulfill requirements. Students who, in consultation with their Advisor, would benefit from additional practical experience, will arrange for that experience directly with their Advisor.

**Program Requirement**

Two practicum placements are required for successful completion of the Student Affairs Administration Masters degree. Students will select two different placements. At least one semester of EAD 893 must be successfully completed prior to a practicum placement. Students enrolled in a practicum during fall or spring semester must complete their practicum requirements, including the final practicum reflection, before the credit for EAD 893 is awarded. The final EAD 893 credit will not be awarded until the student has successfully completed two practica. The curriculum in EAD 893 #1 (first Fall semester) will include preparation for the practicum placement and professional identity development, and in 893 #4 (second Spring semester), synthesizing experiences from work and practicum and the continuing expression of a professional identity.

To be placed in a Practicum a student must also be in good academic standing (3.00 gpa) and be determined ready for a placement by the faculty. Exceptions to practicum requirements are made with the approval of the Practicum Coordinator and the student’s Advisor.

**Expectations and Evaluation**

At the beginning of a practicum, the student and on-site Supervisor will establish an agreement about the nature of the experience and the student’s learning goals. These details are documented in the Student-Supervisor Agreement Form which must be filed with the Placement Coordinator prior to the beginning of the placement. The number of hours varies from eight (8) to twelve (12) per week depending upon the placement; however, students should anticipate committing approximately 120-150 hours per placement. A flexible schedule is also helpful so students can meet expectations of the placement and also take full advantage of the opportunities available. There is little doubt that students benefit most when they can devote considerable time and energy to a Practicum Placement.

The Practicum Coordinator will monitor the practicum experience through several reflective activities and any individual inquiries or concerns about the experiences. Students are encouraged to meet regularly, preferably on a weekly basis, with their Supervisors for planning, discussion and evaluation. A summary activity or paper may be required by the Practicum Supervisor in addition to things requested by the Placement Coordinator. The Placement Coordinator will request a written evaluation of the student from the Practicum Supervisor. Evaluations should reflect the initial goals and expectations of the experience. The Practicum Supervisor’s evaluation and the Practicum Coordinator’s evaluation of reflective activities will be the primary determinants of successful completion of the experience.

Christa J. Porter, Ph.D.
Coordinator, Student Affairs Administration MA Program and Practicum Coordinator
Assistant Professor, Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education
430 Erickson Hall, 517.432-1519, cjporter@msu.edu

October 2013