Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program

Practicum/Internship Manual

Counselor Education Program

Department of Professional Studies

College of Education

University of South Alabama
Practicum/Internship Overview:

The Director of the Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program, Dr. Brandon Browning, serves as the official Practicum/Internship Coordinator (PIC). In that role, he is responsible for vetting and approving all field sites used by the program, and also serves as the key campus-based clinical supervisor. In essence, Dr. Browning guides students through the process of interviewing and placement in a field site. The PIC provides on-campus group supervision to all practicum students and interns throughout the program. If other professors are required for clinical supervision, the PIC also coordinates the selection and use of additional staff.

Practicum: Practicum is the initial field experience for a graduate student in the counseling program and is typically offered in the Summer Semester. In order to register for the Practicum class (CED 576 – Supervised Practicum in Counseling), students must have successfully completed proper coursework, and must have earned a grade of “B” or higher in the following courses:

- CED 571 – Foundations of Clinical Mental Health Counseling
- CED 572 - Principles and Theories of Counseling
- CED 584 - Seminar in Ethical and Legal Issues in Counseling
- CED 574 – Group Counseling & Guidance
- CED 586 – Analysis of Counseling Processes *(typically taken in the semester prior to beginning practicum)*
- EPY 555 – Tests, Measurement & Evaluation
- CED 566 – Multicultural Counseling
- CED 560 – Diagnosis & Treatment Planning in Counseling

Students may be prevented from beginning practicum if significant concerns exist on the part of faculty as to the student’s interpersonal skills, ethical behavior, or professional behavior. Such concerns would usually be reflected in feedback provided to students in CED 586 and 574 which are clinical skills-based courses that require students to demonstrate counseling skills in a mock environment. Feedback may also be provided as part of the biannual faculty evaluation of student dispositions. See the program’s Retention and Dismissal Policy in the Student Handbook.

Counseling Practicum lasts one semester and requires 100 total hours on-site, 40 of which are to be spent in providing direct counseling services to clients. Practicum hours must be completed in a single agency/site. Each Practicum site must be selected from a limited number of pre-approved sites provided by the PIC. Sites not on this list will be approved only on a case-by-case basis, and at the PIC’s discretion.
**Internship**: In order to register for the Internship course, students must have earned a grade of “B” or higher in the Practicum course, and submit a completed Internship Agreement contract (signed by the prospective site-supervisor) to the Internship Coordinator.

Internship sites must be selected from a limited number of pre-approved sites provided by the PIC. Sites not on this list will be approved only on a case-by-case basis, and at the PIC’s discretion. Internship must be completed within a minimum of two semesters, and a maximum of six consecutive semesters.

Internship consists of 600 total hours on-site, 240 of which must be “direct service hours.” Internship hours should typically be completed entirely within a single agency/site. Completing Internship hours at multiple sites is sometimes necessary to meet a student’s professional development goals, but must be approved by PIC.

**Practicum to Internship**: Practicum and Internship are separate experiences. You will get two separate agreement contracts signed, first for Practicum, and then, later, for your Internship; this is true even if you complete both at the same agency. The Practicum and Internship experiences require separate contracts so that both the student and site have an opportunity to exit the relationship after practicum if they so desire. Lastly, hours accrued in Practicum cannot transfer and count towards Internship.

There are three basic routes to completing these two training experiences: a) you can complete the Practicum and Internship in separate agencies, b) you can complete the Practicum and Internship in the same agency, c) you can complete the Practicum and Internship in the same agency, but split your Internship across two agencies (you cannot split the Practicum across two agencies). It is important to be aware of the costs/benefits to each of these routes.

Splitting the Practicum and Internship between two agencies is an important option if the student has two separate professional development goals or wants to get clinical experiences in two different settings. Splitting these two experiences is also an important option if the student has difficulty or concerns with their initial Practicum placement which necessitate moving to a new setting for Internship. Note, that the same option holds true for an agency if concerns arise about a student during Practicum that leads to the agency declining to sign a follow-up Internship contract with that student.

On the other hand, completing the Practicum and Internship in one setting also has advantage. Going this route will result in about 1-year (assuming you are logging about 10-13 hours per week during Practicum and 16-20 hours per week during Internship), which provides the student with the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in an agency. This route also may make it easier to find a quality Internship site. Sites often are not willing to accept a student for only a one semester Practicum. This is because the 10 weeks that Practicum lasts is not enough time for the site to integrate you into their culture and policies. In some cases, if a site knows you will only be spending your Practicum experience with them, this may shut you out of more advanced experiences that could occur during Practicum.

Lastly, you can split Internship across two agencies. This has the advantage of exposing the student to a broader range of clients and types of clinical work, but may pose a challenge in terms of the increased travel costs and time management stresses involved.
A decision to pursue this option must be carefully considered and can only be implemented with the approval of the PIC.

Acceptance to a Practicum/Internship Site:

Acceptance as a graduate student in one of the counseling programs does not guarantee that you will obtain acceptance into a Practicum or Internship site. This is a separate process from being admitted into the program or from making successful academic progress. A detailed guide to the process for applying for Practicum/Internship is provided later in this document.

Supervision & Evaluations:

During both Practicum and Internship, you should have the opportunity to get feedback from your site supervisor on your counseling practice through the use of audio or video tapes of your counseling sessions. At some agencies feedback via tapes of your counseling work will not be possible due to legal limits or agency policies, and in such case the supervisor may sit in on your sessions and evaluate your work through that means.

During both your Practicum and Internship experience, your site-supervisor will be asked to evaluate your work formally on several occasions. Your supervisor will also complete a comprehensive on-line evaluation at the middle and at the end of the Practicum experience as well as provide biweekly feedback to the faculty practicum instructor on your performance. At the end of both practicum and internship experiences you will be asked to provide formal feedback about your experiences at the site including your experiences with your site-supervisor.

During Practicum you will attend a regular 2.5-hour class each week. One hour each week of this class will be focused on didactic coverage of advanced counseling issues and 1.5 hours each week will be focused on providing you with group clinical supervision of your practicum counseling duties. While you are on internship you must attend a 1.5 hour meeting each week. This meeting focuses solely on group clinical supervision of your internship counseling duties. Attendance to internship group supervision is mandatory. Finally, you must receive 1 contiguous hour of clinical supervision from your site supervisor each week throughout your Practicum and Internship experience. If you fail to receive the individual supervision for more than a week this should be reported back to your Practicum or Internship instructor.

Liability Insurance:

Prior to beginning a Practicum and throughout the entirety of the Practicum/Internship experience, students must have professional liability insurance. You will be asked to provide proof of insurance before being cleared for participation in Practicum/Internship, and must supply proof that the insurance has been renewed if your Practicum/Internship
experience lasts beyond one year. You can obtain such insurance from any of the following groups:

- American Counseling Association – http://www.acait.com/

Planning for Practicum/Internship:

Your graduate program is designed to be as flexible as is possible while still providing you with a rigorous and high quality set of training experiences in professional counseling. There are several considerations that a student must take into account upon entering a graduate program as to how they will complete their Practicum/Internship field experiences. During roughly your first three semesters of the program while you are enrolled in your didactic coursework (if you are attending full-time, e.g. three classes per semester), you can likely work full-time and attend classes at night. While this is possible, that doesn’t mean it’s easy. However, upon entering your Practicum and Internship sequence you can expect to be devoting between about 15 hours per week to your learning and counseling work on-site each week. The times in each day when these 15 Additionally, the hours required to complete your Practicum (which is a warm-up to the more demanding Internship), are relatively small and most students can complete these while working full-time. However, if a full-time job completely limits you to doing practicum hours at night or on weekends you will be severely limited in the available sites that can accommodate such a schedule, and your ability to accrue hours in large enough amounts each week is extremely limited.

To complete the 600 hours required of Internship across two semesters (completing the Internship in only one semester is not allowed), you will need to average about 16 hours per week on-site. It is almost impossible to find a site that can offer that level of hours outside of a 9-5 time window. Also and again, sites that would agree to this are frequently sites that do not meet the program’s expectations anyway. So you are left with two choices:

1. Continue accruing 7 hours or so per week, which will allow you to complete your Internship hours in about 4 semester s or 21-24 months. You have to complete your Internship within 2 years.

OR

2. Begin planning from the moment you enter the program for how you will complete the Internship process. Specifically find a way to make it so that you will have a significant number of hours available each week during the two semesters of Internship, and, ideally, most of this time would be available during 9-5 working hours. This may mean cutting back to a part-time job, using loans, applying for a department assistantship etc. Whatever the
strategy, doing so will allow you to complete your Internship within 2 semesters.

*Bottom Line:* The quality Internship sites with highly trained site-supervisors that serve clients in an ethical and professional manner between the hours of 6 PM and 6 AM and on Saturdays and Sundays are few and far between. You need to be realistic about this aspect of your training from the time you begin the program, and plan accordingly. Your academic program is committed to making sure you become a highly skilled, conscientious and professional counselor who will be able to serve clients effectively. Accomplishing this goal often requires that we place a higher priority on quality training opportunities than we do student convenience. Unfortunately, these two important priorities often come in conflict at the point of the Internship process.

*Internship & Course Registration:*

Practicum and Internship must be completed back-to-back, e.g. if you do your Practicum in the Summer semester, the Internship should begin during the following Fall and Spring semesters.

You cannot accrue hours until a Practicum or Internship Agreement Form has been completed and turned in to the departmental secretary and until you have begun attending the Practicum or Internship class. Often students do not end up completing their hours in the semester(s) in which they are formally registered for the Practicum or Internship class.

If this occurs during Practicum, the student may be approved to register for the subsequent Internship class by the Internship Coordinator if an Internship Agreement has been signed by the Practicum site or some other site. The student would continue accruing Practicum hours at the Practicum site during the next semester, but will receive a grade of “P” (in progress) for Practicum until the 100 hours of Practicum are completed. The student could then, assuming an Internship Agreement has been executed, immediately proceed to begin accruing Internship hours.

If a student needs to continue accruing Internship hours after the semester in which they were registered for the Internship class, they will also need to register for at least 1 hour of the Internship class until they complete their hours. Internship must be completed within six semesters and over a minimum of two semesters.

*Applying for Practicum/Internship:*

*Step 1 - Practicum Application*

You will receive a link from the Internship Coordinator to an online Practicum Application form and process at the beginning of spring semester prior to beginning your practicum. This is designed to help your program’s Internship Coordinator find the best placement that meets your goals and needs. Your Internship Coordinator has a list of pre-
approved and other possible Practicum/Internship sites you can choose from. Once you have provided the information requested in the Practicum Application you have then formally applied for placement in a Practicum site. Students should apply within 30 days of the beginning of spring semester.

For students who choose not to complete their Internship at their Practicum site, this desire should be communicated to Internship Coordinator at least 30 days prior to the beginning of the semester in which their Internship will begin.

Step 2 - Site Approval:

Approved Sites: The Internship Coordinator has developed relationships with several community agencies and clinics that over time have become pre-approved sites. These are sites that provide the best clinical training opportunities in the judgment of the PIC. The current approved Practicum/Internship sites are listed on the program web page:

http://sites.google.com/site/usacommunitycounseling/practicum-internship

Do not call these sites on your own because there is a process in place for applying to these sites. Please inform when asked in the Practicum Application process if you are interested in one of these sites.

Student-Selected Sites: Student-selected sites are generally not an option. If a student has an extreme circumstance which he or she believes necessitates utilization of a training other than the pre-approved sites, they should make an appointment with the PIC to discuss this as soon as possible. Student-selected sites will rarely be approved, if ever, and only on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the coordinator.

Practica & Internship at Your Job: First, internships at your job will only be approved if you work at one of the pre-approved practicum/internship sites, or if the slots at the pre-approved site have already been filled. Such placements at a student’s current place of employment are generally frowned upon. The reason is obvious: We do not want to encourage dual relationships and we want the intern to learn NEW skills. Most people already know how to do their job—we want them to learn something new. If you want such an Internship to be considered, you must meet with Internship Coordinator. Such a Practicum or Internship experience will only be approved if the slots available at the pre-approved sites have already been filled for that semester, or if the student is already an employee at one of the pre-approved sites where they are trying to do their practicum or internship. To obtain approval for a Practicum/Internship at your place of employment you must meet with the Internship Coordinator and a much more detailed Internship Agreement must be drawn up that makes exceedingly clear that ensures the following criteria are met:

1. The student has an exceedingly clear set of time allotted each week to take part in clinical counseling services that are BEYOND their current skill set and are activities that are in no way part of their current job description.
2. Your site supervisor cannot be your normal job supervisor/boss.
3. Internship Coordinator must have the utmost confidence that the site-supervisor in this situation understands the professional identity and standards of training for professional counselors.

Step 3: Interviewing with a Site.

After you have provided the information requested in the initial Practicum Application, the Internship Coordinator will e-mail you to schedule a time for an individual meeting to discuss your Practicum/Internship. At that meeting the student and Internship Coordinator will agree at which potential sites the student will interview.

If a student applies to multiple sites, they will submit a ranking to the Internship Coordinator no later than two weeks prior to the end of the semester. For sites that interview multiple students, I will ask that they submit their rankings to me by the same deadline. I will then match the student to their highest ranked site for which they were accepted.

A note on interviewing; treat this as a job interview. Dress appropriately, act professionally. A good training site will ask you questions about your basic assumptions and theoretical stance and your past experiences as well as about your professional identity. Don’t be surprised if questions about a hypothetical case are also asked. Remember you are also interviewing the site and should attend to how well you seem to fit with the site’s culture and the nature of the work the site performs including their client population.

Step 4 – Matching with a Site

After all interviews are completed each student will submit via an online form their rankings of the sites at which they interviewed. If a student is unwilling to accept placement at a particular site, the simply do not rank that site. All site also submit rankings of the students they interviewed. Sites can also choose to not rank a student which means they are unwilling to accept them for placement. The Internship Coordinator then tries to match the student with their highest ranked site taking into account the site’s rankings of students. The final decision of where a student matches ultimately rests with the judgment of the Internship Coordinator, however.

Step 5 - Practicum or Internship Agreement Form

There are two separate forms, one when solidifying your acceptance into a Practicum and a separate form when solidifying your acceptance to continue your Practicum as an Internship at the same site, or if you are switching and completing your Internship at a separate site. Even if you are continuing your training on to Internship at the same site, a new Internship Agreement Form must be signed. Remember that Practicum and Internship are two separate “contracts” between the university, the student and the site.
The Process of Getting the Practicum/Internship Form Completed

1. Student receives acceptance at a Practicum or Internship site, which as previously been approved by Internship Coordinator.

2. The student should provide their program secretary with the following information:
   a. name of the agency
   b. name and credentials of their site supervisor including their licenses and certifications.
   c. semester in which the Practicum or Internship should begin
   d. expected inclusive dates of the Practicum or Internship experience
   e. expected average number of hours per week the student plans to spend on-site during the Practicum or Internship experience.

3. The program secretary will prepare 3 copies of the form, have Internship Coordinator sign all 3 copies and communicate to the student when it is ready.

4. The student will pick up the forms and schedule a meeting with their site-supervisor. The student and the site-supervisor should review the form and both sign all three copies. One copy should be left for the site supervisor; the student should keep one copy for themselves, and bring the remaining copy back to Program secretary for inclusion in their file.

5. Once the Practicum/Internship agreement is complete the student may be cleared to register for the Practicum/Internship course. If a student wishes to register for the Practicum or Internship course without a signed and filed Practicum/Internship agreement form they must receive direct permission from Internship Coordinator.

6. The student can only begin accruing Practicum hours once the semester for which they are registered for the course has begun. Students can begin accruing Internship hours so long as they are either 1) currently registered for either Practicum and have a completed Internship Agreement form, or 2) are already registered for Internship. Remember though that the Internship must last two semesters at minimum. See below for a more detailed description of when Internship hours can be accrued. Excess practicum hours do not transfer over and apply to Internship hours.

Overall Timeline for Practicum Placement Process

1. February – Internship Coordinator meets with prospective practicum students and goes over the interview and match process.
2. March – students schedule and complete interviews with a minimum of 3 sites
3. April – students and sites submit rankings and notification of matches is given by May 1st at the latest.

4. May – students get Practicum Agreement Form signed and copies turned into the Internship Coordinator. Students complete all orientation activities for the site.

5. June 1st or thereabout – student begins practicum

6. July 1st or thereabout – student and site supervisor discuss their standing and whether they will be offered to stay on for internship at the site.

7. July 7th or thereabout – site supervisor completes the Mid-Point Practicum Evaluation form.

8. August 1st – student ideally has Internship Agreement Form signed and turned in by this point, or has been informed they will not be accepted to stay as an intern and the Internship Coordinator begins process of finding an alternative Internship placement.

9. August 15th or thereabout
   a. Student completes 10 weeks of practicum accruing 100 hours on-site. All practicum logs signed by site supervisor are turned in by student.
   b. All required tape/live observation forms are turned in by student.
   c. Site supervisor has completed the Final Practicum Evaluation form.
   d. Student has completed the Student Evaluation of Practicum Experience form.

10. August 15th – December 1st
    a. Complete roughly 300 hours of internship; all hours logs up to date
    b. Site supervisor completes the Mid-Point Internship Evaluation

11. December 1st – May 1st
    a. Complete the entire 600 hours of internship; all hours logs up to date
    b. Site supervisor completes the Final Internship Evaluation
    c. Student completes the Program Exit Survey and Student Evaluation of Internship Experience forms.

Life During Practicum & Internship

Beginning to Accrue Hours

You can only begin accruing Practicum hours once…
   a. You have the Practicum Agreement form signed by all three parties and have returned a copy to the PIC.

   AND

   b. You are actively enrolled in the Practicum course, i.e. the semester in which you are enrolled in the Practicum course has begun.

You can only begin accruing Internship hours once…
a. You have the Internship Agreement form signed by all three parties and have returned a copy to the PIC.

**AND**

b. A grade has been posted for the Practicum course, i.e. you cannot accrue Internship hours until you have completed Practicum. Any hours beyond the 100 required for Practicum that are accrued during the Practicum semester do not apply to the 600 hours required for Internship, i.e. Practicum and Internship hours do not mix.

*Hours Log:* You will use a standard hours log, available at the Internship web page. Each student should make their own copies and turn in one each week to document their progress. Turn in your log every week at your group supervision meeting, not all at once near the end of the Internship. Your Internship site-supervisor should sign each log. The site-supervisor is attesting that you have actually performed the amount of time you have specified and engaged in the type of activities you have specified.

*Required Total Hours:*

- 600 total hours, 240 of which are spent in providing direct counseling services.

*What are Direct vs. Indirect Hours?* “Direct Service” is defined by CACREP as, “interaction with clients that includes the application of counseling, consultation, or human development skills. In general, the term is used in these standards to refer to time spent by Practicum or Internship students working with clients”. Furthermore, “counseling” is defined by ACA as, “The application of mental health, psychological, or human development principles, through cognitive, affective, behavioral or systematic intervention strategies, that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology”.

Therefore, any service provided in the presence of the client can be considered “direct service”. This is a broad category including clinical services such as individual/group counseling/psychotherapy, as well as non-clinical services such as psychoeducation, skills training, case management etc. Sites will vary in the degree to which the opportunity for you to provide counseling/therapy services is present. Some sites consist of a much larger proportion of non-clinical “direct services”. Your academic program greatly values and will give precedence to sites at which formal mental health services are being offered, e.g. traditional individual and group counseling/psychotherapy, and at which students will have substantive opportunities to observe, learn and eventually autonomously provide such services.

Completing an Internship at a site with fewer opportunities of this kind could limit your established competencies upon graduating from this program. Your academic program will only endorse you for professional practice in areas in which you have established evidence of competence during the course of your study. Bottom line: you should think
carefully about choosing a site that matches your interests, and which will provide you opportunities to establish the competencies you think you will need in your particular career path.

A note on observing the provision of direct services; observing others providing counseling services is not considered direct service during either the Practicum or the Internship experience, but this practice is encouraged. Particularly during the Practicum observation of senior counselors is a common method of allowing the student to begin to become comfortable with the clinical setting and counseling work.

**Evaluation**

Your site supervisor will complete three evaluations of your counseling work:
1. at the mid-point of your practicum,
2. at the end of your Practicum,
3. at the mid-point during your Internship and
4. at the end of your Internship

In addition, during the Practicum experience either your site supervisor or a USA supervisor will directly observe or review your counseling work via audio/visual recording and provide written feedback on your counseling skills on 4 separate occasions. This same process is expected to occur at least twice during each semester in which the student is active as an intern at a site as well. For the typical student this means that a minimum of 8 written evaluations by a supervisor will be generated based on reviews of the student’s counseling work either through direct observation or audio/visual tape review. In all of these cases, i.e. evaluation forms or observation of counseling, the student will be provided the supervisor’s feedback in addition to the Internship Coordinator.

**Practicum – Individual/Triadic Supervision**

During your initial practicum you will be assigned a site supervisor by the agency. This supervisor will meet with your individually or with you and another trainee (triadically) once per week throughout your practicum. You will ALSO be assigned a faculty or doctoral student individual supervisor from USA. You will also meet with this USA faculty/doc student supervisor at most once per week for supervision and at a minimum once every other week for an hour. The difference between these two types of supervision is that your site supervisor is more responsible for the day-to-day activities you engage in at your site and the specific counseling tasks you apply to your cases. Your faculty/doc student supervisor is more focused on helping you grow in your self-awareness, knowledge and skills as you experience various roles at your practicum site. Once your progress to internship you only meet individually/triadically with your site supervisor, and supervision with USA faculty/doc students is only done in group format (see below).
Practicum – Biweekly Consultation with Site Supervisor

During your Practicum the PIC or another designated counseling faculty member will consult by phone or email with your site supervisor twice each month to discuss your progress in Practicum and any concerns or dilemma that have arisen. In the weeks that this consultation does not occur, the site supervisor will be sent a brief internet questionnaire that asks them to rate your performance across a range of broad domains of professional counseling practice. The site supervisor will complete a lengthier internet rating form at the end of the Practicum semester.

Practicum & Internship - Weekly Group Supervision

As long as you are actively accruing Practicum or Internship hours you are required to attend the weekly group supervision/class meeting. At the Practicum level, this supervision occurs during your 2.5-hour long Practicum class, for which the instructor will vary. At the level of Internship students will attend a 1.5-hour weekly group supervision with their program’s Internship Coordinator. Attendance is required and students are expected to miss no more than 2 supervision sessions in a Fall or Spring semester and 1 supervision session in a Summer semester.

Professional Dress & Conduct

Counselors-in-training are expected to behave as counseling professionals. All students in Practicum/Internship are to dress and act ethically and professionally at their sites.

Once you are working on site, remain focused on your career goals and help the site meet its goals as well. Have an attitude of excellence. At any time that the site’s instructions for you disagree or conflict with the Practicum/Internship instructions, notify your University supervisor immediately.

ACA Ethics Code

While serving as a practicum or internship student this is your opportunity to see clinical counseling practice in action as well as ethics in action. As part of your agreement with the site you will agree to abide by the ACA Code of Ethics (having already completed your ethics course) and to seek consultation from site or faculty supervisors when an ethics issue arises. Failure to abide by the code or seek appropriate consultation could affect your standing in the program or lead to an individual remediation plan if unethical behaviors or poor ethical decision-making emerges as a problem for the student.