ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY
MS PROGRAMS IN COUNSELING
MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING
FIELD EXPERIENCE
POLICY MANUAL

Definition

The field experience internships (CPS 790, CPS 791 and CPS 795) are required course in the MS degree programs in Mental Health Counseling. These courses are designed to provide students with an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge and practical skills gained through experiences in a supervised clinical context. Students may complete their field experience requirement in a public or private mental health clinic, social service agency hospital, rehabilitation center, school, corporation, or other setting in which mental health services are offered to individuals, groups, couples, and/or families under supervision.

Field Experience I, (CPS 790) (3 credits) is designed primarily, although not exclusively, for students who enter one of the MS degree programs without prior experience in their academic specialization area. Field Experience II (CPS 791) and Field Experience III (CPS 795) (3 credits) are a continuation of Field Experience I. They offer an opportunity for students to further develop and expand their specialized therapeutic skills. All courses are arranged through contractual agreement and with the sponsoring field site, the student, and the St. Thomas University Counseling Programs. Contracts are established and renewed immediately prior to the beginning of each academic term, while evaluation forms for both supervisor and supervisee are completed at the end of each practicum.

Students who are currently working as counselors in a mental health setting under the supervision of a licensed mental health counselor, marriage and family therapist, clinical social worker, or psychologist may apply to complete the field experience internship at their present work setting. However, work experience must be equivalent to experience gained through Field Experience I, II, III. A student must show evidence that she/he will engage in new learning experiences during the internship periods. Consequently, specific learning objectives must be articulated and agreed upon between the student, the Faculty Supervisor and the Field Site Supervisor. Application may be made to the Faculty Supervisor of the Counseling Programs.
Benefits of the Field Experience Internship

To supervising Agency/Site:

1. Provides an opportunity to train and screen potential candidates for employment.
2. Provides a cost effective means of offering additional therapeutic services.
3. Provides an opportunity to constructively contribute to the Counseling Programs’ curriculum.
4. Establishes communications between the supervisory site and the University.

To students:

1. Provides an opportunity to apply knowledge and skills in a supervised context.
2. May satisfy the academic requirement in the State of Florida for candidacy toward licensure as mental health counselor or marriage and family therapist.
3. Enriches classroom learning experiences.
4. Provides professional networking opportunities.
5. The internship experience may lead to employment.

To the University/Counseling Programs:

1. Provides a mechanism to test out whether theories and techniques taught in the classroom are applicable in a practical setting.
2. Enhances the quality of the academic program by providing a learning alternative to students.
3. Provides students with the opportunity to verify career choices.
4. Enhances communication with community facilities offering counseling services to individuals and families.

Course Requirements

1. Complete a minimum of 333 hours per academic term at the Field Site, one half of which includes client contact.
2. Attend a regularly schedule Field Experience group meetings and periodic, on campus, supervisory meetings.
3. Complete the Field Experience Progress Notes.
4. Complete the Field Site Evaluation.
5. Review the Field Site Evaluation and the Field Instruction Evaluation with the Field Site Supervisor.
6. Submit Progress Notes and Evaluations to the Faculty Supervisor prior to the end of the academic term.
Responsibilities

Field Experience Site

Field Site Supervisor:

The Field Site Supervisor is expected to assign a student an appropriate client case load (10 weekly client contact hours) as well as any other relevant, agency related tasks, e.g., intake interviewing, co-facilitation of groups, community outreach, program planning, attendance at staff meetings, etc. Supervision by an experienced professional with at least a master’s degree and licensure in their field is required. Regularly scheduled, face-to-face supervision of the counseling services provided directly by the student is expected. Supervision may include group seminars and case reviews. The Field Site Supervisor is also expected to provide an appraisal of the student’s performance (Field Instruction Evaluation) during the Field Experience. This evaluation will be utilized to determine the student’s final grade.

Counseling Programs

The student is responsible for selecting an appropriate field site at least one month prior to registration. A list of approved field sites is available from the Counseling Programs. A student who elects to complete an internship in a field site not on the approved list must receive prior approval from his/her academic advisor. Once a field site is selected, a student obtains a Field Experience Contract from his/her academic advisor and obtains all appropriate clearance signatures prior to registration. This application services as the contract with the sponsoring field site and St. Thomas University.

Students are required to be present at their field experience sites for a minimum of 333 hours during the academic term. Specific working hours and a weekly schedule are agreed upon in conjunction with the Field Site Supervisor. Learning experiences may include individual, group, couple, or family counseling at an appropriate professional level. Experiences may also include community outreach activities and other relevant, agency related tasks as assigned by the Field Site Supervisor. Students are required to maintain Progress Notes and submit them, prior to the end of the academic term. A Field Site Evaluation must be completed by the student and must be reviewed and signed by the Field Site Supervisor.
Faculty Supervisor:

The faculty Supervisor conducts a minimum of two phone contacts with the Field Site Supervisor and visits the field site once during the academic term to discuss the performance and progress of a student. The Faculty Supervisor is available to students to discuss experiences, client cases, and concerns on an ongoing basis. The Faculty Supervisor is responsible for conferring with the Field Site Supervisor and awarding a student’s final grade.

Student

Field Experience Progress Notes:

Students are required to maintain Progress Notes documenting their activities and the therapeutic services provided during the Field Experience Internship. The Progress Notes are best completed on a daily basis, and if possible, immediately following each session with a client (individual, group, couple, or family). Students may also document their experiences and learning resulting from individual and group supervisory sessions. This provides students with an ongoing record of client contacts, therapeutic process, and the effects of specific interventions. In addition, it is a means of self-evaluating the achievement of learning objective. The following is meant to serve as a guide in the preparation of the Field Experience Progress Notes. Both students and Field Site Supervisors are free to amend or add sections.

- Date
- Description of case / activity, e.g., individual, family, community outreach presentation
- Relevant client data, e.g., age, ethnic background, sex, educational background
- Length of counseling session, activity
- Description of context, e.g. client’s presenting problems, session number, the theme of a presentation
- Counselor’s perceptions of the clients process
- Counselor’s experience during the session/activity
- Counselor’s strategies, interventions and perceived effects
- General comments and process notes
- Future plan of action

Grading:

At the end of the academic term, students receive a grade of Pass (P) or Fail (F), for the Field Experience Internship. A passing grade will be assigned based on satisfactory completion of all course requirements.
Ethical Issues

Prior to engaging in the Field Experience Internship, students are advised to review the Ethical Standards of the American Counseling Association; the Code of Ethical Principles for Marriage and Family Therapists; and the American Psychological Association’s Ethical Principles of Psychologists. No information is to be presented in the Field Experience Progress Notes or in any other verbal or written form that permits identification of specific individual, couple, or family. Clients are to be advised at the initiation of a therapeutic relationship of their right to confidentiality and of the counselor’s intent to respect that right, unless under court subpoena.

Personal Liability

Student interns are encouraged to obtain personal, professional liability insurance during the time they are working in the field providing therapeutic services. Such coverage is available at reasonable cost through student membership in any one of a number of professional organizations.

Final Comments

Field Experience is an integral component of professional preparations in the therapeutic disciplines. The faculty of the Counseling Programs at St. Thomas University are committed to providing quality educational experiences for students. We would expect anyone involved in the Field Experience Internship who has concerns about any aspect of the program to contact the Faculty Supervisor. It is our intent to offer a program in which all participants work as colleagues in a cooperative, meaningful way.