

Counseling Practicum I

Lecture 1

Introduction to Counseling Practicum

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Introduction to Lecture 1

This lecture will explain the importance of practicum and internship in the journey of a counseling student from classroom to field experiences as well as guide on steps to follow when choosing a practicum and internship site.

Expected Learning Outcomes

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

- (i) Explain the importance of practicum
- (ii) Identify factors to consider before choosing a practicum and/or internship site

Preparation for Practicum

It takes a lot of prior preparation in class for a counseling trainee/student before they embark on real client work in the field. This preparation entails adequate training and education in theory and practice of counseling, ethical practice, and clinical supervision.

This unit, therefore, prepares a student counselor for internship (macro practice). It is a test of what the student has been doing in class, the ability to translate theory into practice.

It is both challenging and exciting with the intern/student counselor experiencing mixed emotions about the whole experience (Corey, 2016). It is a unit that helps to reduce practicum related anxiety.

The experience may be confusing but provides the student with a very good opportunity of reassessment for continuous growth change and professional development. The class gives the student a chance to exercise their freedom of client work as well as a platform to interact with a professional supervisor in a clinical setting like the one they will find in the field.

The counseling market is dynamic, and the required practicum and internship competencies have been increasingly influenced by evolving accreditation standards for professional counseling programs, counseling accreditation bodies, emerging issues in mental health and the licensing authorities in a country or state. Counselor education and counseling psychology training programs therefore align to these changes. The major applied components in counselor preparation are practicum and internship. All individuals involved in the applied training components of counseling and psychology need to carefully examine the expectations they bring to the practicum and internship. The practicum professor/trainer, practicum student/trainee, site supervisor, and professional accreditation agencies have varied expectations about practicum and internship (Jungers & Scott, 2019).

The student is now preparing to exit the training session and join the professionals in the field. This demands for thorough preparation that involves honest self-assessment, keeping track of skills set inventory and willingness to receive constructive feedback from the program supervisor and the peers during the micro practice sessions. Internship is almost a sure way for the student that they are about to graduate with a relevant certificate in counseling. Most students by the time they go for internship have joined a professional body and are looking for upward professional movement through seeking relevant licensure and accreditation.

The counselor continues to read and write as she /he encounters challenging clients in the field. It is an empowering moment for the intern to relate theory and practice and research to fill in practice gaps. They are confident enough after an intensive experience to develop personal style of helping and relating well with colleagues, supervisors, families among others. The practicum placement is often the first opportunity that a student must gain experience working with a client population.

Approval to proceed to a field site placement usually occurs after the completion of academic prerequisites. These prerequisites include units relevant to effective counseling practice. It also includes peer to peer practicum exercises or practicum lab situations (micro practice) with volunteer clients or with peer counseling interactions

where students can demonstrate and practice basic counseling skills and integration of theory into practice.

Most counselor training programs have established guidelines and procedures for procuring a field placement that can be approved by the program, and they provide a list of possible sites where previous students have successfully completed practicum and internship.

Some sites require a signed memorandum of understanding with a paid-up fee during application for placement. An important consideration is always the credentials of the site and those of the proposed site supervisor, as well as the site supervisor's knowledge of the university's practicum and internship course requirements.

Some of the requirements include a specified number of hours in different categories of practice for instance individual therapy, group therapy, clinical supervision, and consultation (Jungers & Scott, *Securing a Practicum and Internship Site*, 2019)

Getting Started with Practicum and Internship

Outlined below are relevant guiding steps and tasks to undertake before choosing and internship site.

- a) Choose a relevant internship site that suits your interests in current and future practice specialization (areas of expertise).
- b) Write a practicum prospectus or proposal that you will follow through during internship till the close of internship period.
- c) Choose a supervisor (registered professional in your field or one related to your field, usually with higher qualifications than you with ample clinical experience) who will be reviewing your internship experience with you regularly during internship.
- d) Prepare or carry relevant internship documents (consent /memorandum of agreement forms, intake forms, assessment tools, log in sheets, client case notes forms/guidelines, supervisions forms, worksheets among others).
- e) Conduct a self – assessment/ analysis task (SCOT) that will help you analyze your strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats in relation to your practicum and internship
- f) Keep a journal booklet/diary – to keep track of your experiences and achieved tasks.

- g) Give name and credentials of program supervisor for individual support. Students are allowed to choose experts outside the university/college provided they are qualified and accredited and approved by the university practicum and internship department.
- h) Develop an evaluation guideline to use for self- monitoring and evaluation during internship.

The intern needs to be prepared that the program supervisor will carry out regular supervision before, during and after internship. The more honest an intern is about facing self as a counselor who has just began an exciting but challenging journey of client work, the better for them as this provides an opportunity to become a better therapist day in day out.

Choosing the Internship Site

This task is very crucial for interns and the following factors need to be considered with utmost concern:

- a) The student's needs and interests (which type of clients do you like working with, are there certain issues that you like dealing with?).
- b) The college/university /program guidelines/ requirements. This will help you as an intern to remain focused on the outcome goals.
- c) Professional certification/ state licensure.

- d) The experiential and learning opportunities provided by the internship site (helps the intern make decision on whether they will benefit or prepare them psychologically on what to expect).
- e) Some interns may require certain academic requirements to work in certain practicum sites (be honest with the same to help you work more effectively).
- f) A copy of your resume is important because certain sites must go through your competencies before been accepted.
- g) In certain cases, some interns must meet requirements placed by the Human Resource Department (HRD) or careers and fields placement department before getting counseling clearance to go for internship, it is advisable for interns to comply.

NB: If an intern is not sure about a particular area of interest for internship, they are advised to consult with program supervisor/coordinator and get information about available sites and try visiting them and see if they would enjoy and learn from them.

The following questions are common with interns that serve a guide to choosing an internship site:

What kind of people/ population do I enjoy working with?

What type of problems might I want to deal with? Will I encounter these types of problems here?

Is the internship/practicum experience paid or unpaid?

Does the placement allow for credit toward state licensure or certification requirements?

How much will I be working with clients, rather than observing or running errands?

Will I receive adequate individual supervision? Is the supervisor credentialed at the independent practice level of licensure or certification? Having met the supervisor, do I feel that we will be able to maintain a good working relationship?

Am I covered by liability insurance? What is the general atmosphere at this placement site? Is it formal or informal? Safe or unsafe? Will I be comfortable working here?

What other mental health professionals are on staff? Will I be directly involved with psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, counselors, nurses, teachers, or childcare workers? Will I be part of treatment team?

Do you think the site offers an opportunity for you to be absorbed after the internship or help you secure a job placement later?

References

Corey, G. (2016). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*. California: Routledge.

Jungers, C. M., & Scott, J. (2019). *Practicum and Internship : Textbook and Resource Guide for Counseling and Psychotherapy* (6 ed.). New York: Routledge.

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