

What I Wish I Knew Before Starting Practicum

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Before

- Start early! It's likely to take more time than expected to find a suitable site
- You are offering a valuable service free of charge; remember your self-worth and pick a site you love
- Approach multiple sites and compare opportunities: don't just take the first one
- Not all sites or site supervisors are equal—you'll learn more from a better site
- Take the time to find a professional & well-resourced site with optimal supervision
- Some sites have a process for training and accommodating interns, others do not
- Find out from classmates in field placement about the merits of specific sites
- Practicum/Internship is vastly different from the theoretical aspect of school; it requires an active approach, applied skills, and new and possibly uncomfortable behaviors
- Thinking of field placement as a job and not a class may be a helpful approach

During the Search

- Site employees are not UNCP professors, and don't expect them to be as available
- They are busy seeing clients, managing the practice, and navigating the mental health system
- Landing a site will require job skills and not necessarily school-based skills
- It may require persistence and initiative to engage with site personal
- You may not get return phone calls or emails immediately, so you may need to *drive the process*
- Professionalism is required in all you do: phone calls, email, site visits, interviews
- Create a resume and prepare a narrative to support bulleted highlights: bring your resume to life
- Sites will require you to take a proactive role and find ways to provide value to clients
- In return, the site will offer you experience with clients, the mental health systems, and supervision
- Fitting your skills into site requirements, policies, procedures, software, etc. is part of the job
- You are there to learn *and* to serve clients and the agency/practice as a whole

During Field Placement

- You are now part of the imperfect mental health care system
- You might not be ready to do the counseling that you imagined
- You may need to do mechanical tasks in order to learn the agency's system
- It may take time and practice to become proficient enough to meet agency requirements
- Take an active role in adding value to the agency: you are not there to learn passively
- It's normal to be nervous and uncomfortable in front of clients, especially when recording sessions
- Interacting with clients with real issues is likely to be stressful: remember self care?
- You may need to be assertive when getting supervision or completing vital documentation
- It's your responsibility to budget time for your school requirement, not your supervisors
- Take the high road: remember you are a representative of the UNCP program
- It's not uncommon to land your first job at the internship site or from contacts made there