

Appendix G

Practicum Guidelines for Graduate Students

Clinical Psychology
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI

The purpose of this memo is to consolidate and to clarify information about the practicum requirements of the University of Michigan Clinical Psychology Program (hereafter described as “the Program”). Please read this memo carefully, and save it for future reference. If there are any questions, please contact the Coordinator of Clinical Training (CCT), Clinical Psychology Area Chair or Director of Clinical Training (DCT). When in doubt, ask!

Bottom Line

The practicum is the responsibility of the Program. Practicum placements and their sequencing must be approved in advance by the Program’s Practicum Committee and the student’s clinical faculty advisor.

The Program adheres to the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines requiring pre-internship practicum experience. The Program requires at least 500 hours of practicum experience, of which at least 25% involves face-to-face client contact (assessment, diagnosis, therapy, co-therapy, and so on) and that there be at least one hour of individual or group supervision per week. In order to obtain a Master’s Educational (Temporary) Limited License (TLLP), the state of Michigan requires 500 practicum hours supervised by a licensed psychologist. Most of the agencies associated with UM offering advanced practicum want/require interns to have limited licenses. The reality of the National Internship Match is that many applicants have 1500+ hours of practicum. All students should discuss their plans with their advisors as soon as possible, and all advisors should have ongoing discussions with their students about options for clinical training.

1. **Practicum placements must be completed before internship.**
2. The exact state of the MI requirement to obtain a TLLP is: "The Supervision Confirmation Form confirming that a 500-hour practicum was completed during the master's degree program ... The applicant must meet with a supervisor who is a fully-licensed psychologist for at least 8 hours a month during the practicum. The supervisor must list the duties performed, including assessment (testing), evaluation, and treatment, and must verify that the duties were performed in an organized health care setting. Credit for the practicum must be received from the University and should be listed on the transcripts."

The Program faculty has devoted a great deal of time discussing practicum issues. Recommendations and guidelines are highlighted below.

- Practicum experiences should entail empirically-validated/supported/informed assessment and intervention.
- Practicum experiences should entail the evaluation of contribution of assessment to intervention and the effect of treatment on outcome.
- Practicum experiences should familiarize students with diverse populations, settings, theories, and approaches.
- Practicum experiences should provide opportunities for students to develop expertise in a particular area of clinical or theoretical interest.

The 2007 guidelines indicated that a given practicum placement should generally be at least 8 hours per week but no more than 10-15 hours per week. (1) Clarification: A practicum placement during the spring or summer can entail more than 15 hours per week. (2) It is also recognized that students may need to spend higher numbers of hours in a practicum placement during the academic year in order to gain the best training experience at that site. Students should consult with their advisor when considering a practicum experience that exceeds 10-15 hours.

What is a Practicum?

According to Hatcher and Lassiter (2007, p. 49), the practicum in clinical psychology is “the first step on the path of professional development toward independent professional competence in psychology. The practicum comprises supervised training experiences ... [and] ... introduces students to the core competencies of the discipline, bringing classroom education to life in practice settings, and laying groundwork for further training in internship and beyond.”

This is a general definition of a practicum that stresses its critical role in preparing students for clinical psychology internships. Legitimate debate is ongoing in the profession about the more specific features that comprise a practicum experience. Regardless, there is agreement that a practicum minimally requires that students have direct contact with clients *and* be supervised by an experienced psychologist.

Most clinical psychology programs in the United States specify a minimum number of practicum hours, as does our Program, and an appropriate ratio of client contact and supervision, as does our Program. Like all graduate training in clinical psychology, a student’s practicum experience should be sequential, graduated, congruent with the goals and objectives of the program in which the student is enrolled, and integrated with the other training components of the program. The practical implications are that students should usually have diverse practicum experiences and that these should be planned in consultation with the faculty of the program in which they are enrolled.

What is a “Countable” Practicum Hour?

A clinical psychology program is allowed—indeed encouraged and required by APA—to specify exactly what constitutes quantifiable practicum experiences for their students. A very general rubric distinguishes *direct clinical service* (i.e., therapy, co-therapy, assessment, and diagnosis; by the way, 45-50 continuous minutes of direct client contact = one hour), *indirect service* (i.e., activities outside therapy focused on clients, such as observations, chart reviews, writing process notes, reviewing session tapes, case conferences, staff meetings, workshops, library research, and/or program development), and *supervision* (i.e., individual and group supervision; peer supervision; consultation with professionals).

The mix will vary according to the prior experience and current competencies of the practicum student and the features of the specific placement. Assessment labs may be included in countable hours. A question students have asked is: Does “assessment” in the context of a research project yield countable practicum hours? Yes and no. If the research participants are actual or potential clients for clinical services, if there is explicit feedback on the “competence” of the student doing the assessment, and if there is supervision of the assessment by a licensed psychologist, then these hours would fit the spirit of the basic program required practicum. Tests that use an algorithm for scoring (like the CES-D or the BDI), for example, do not count. Supervised diagnostic interviews can count if there is feedback from a supervisor on how well these were done.

In all cases, hours must be carefully tracked by the student in terms of date, time, and specific activity content. For this purpose, we recommend that students use a notebook, computer spreadsheet (backed up!) or available tracking program. The department subscribes to the electronic clinical training hours tracking system Time2Track (<https://time2track.com/>) To repeat, direct clinical service *and* supervision are required for all practicum experiences approved by our Program.

Students must have the Practicum Committee and Coordinator of Clinical Training review proposed practicum hours that fall outside the standard practicum experiences described here. Students may NOT engage in any clinical activities until those activities have received program approval.

Practicum Competencies and Their Assessment

The Association of Directors of Psychology Training Clinics (ADPTC) has addressed in detail the specific competencies to be achieved by practicum students prior to an internship and how to assess these (Hatcher & Lassiter, 2004, 2007). These ideas and recommendations assume that competencies are skills that develop with training and that different levels of competence can and should be recognized:

Prior to any practicum placement, certain baseline competencies need to exist: basic personal and intellectual skills and knowledge from classroom experience about assessment and clinical interviewing, intervention, ethics and legal issues, and individual and cultural differences. These skills and knowledge bases are the focus of required first-year courses in the Program.

Practicum placements themselves are intended to develop a number of specific competencies described in the appended Practicum Student Competency Assessment Form.

The goals for *all* practicum evaluations are to achieve a rating of 3 (developing as expected towards basic competency) or higher in all rated competencies. In addition, students should accrue enough total and direct service hours to make progress toward the 500/25% goal. The goals for the *final* practicum (immediately prior to internship) evaluations are to achieve competency ratings of “intermediate” or higher, to do work that is judged satisfactory on the Practicum Student Competency Assessment Form, and to have accrued enough total and direct service hours to achieve the 500/25% goal. Again, please note: the National Internship Match will likely require many more total hours of practicum experience.

Finally, to monitor and assess the quality of practicum placements, the Program requires all practicum students to complete the Student Practicum Evaluation Form within two weeks of the end of each placement. This form should be completed and emailed directly to Linda Anderson. However, any concerns or problems with a practicum placement should be communicated *immediately* to the Coordinator of Clinical Training.

Practicum Placements

At the end of the Fall semester, students receive a “Practicum Sites Directory” that includes a description of available clinical experiences for the coming year, application requirements, and contact information. Students interview at each of the sites in which they are interested and provide the Coordinator of Clinical Training (CCT) a list of their ranked preferences. In March/April, the Practicum Committee meets to conduct a practicum “match” to coordinate student preferences, site preferences, and program considerations. Results of practicum match are then shared with the student and site. A student-specific practicum may be proposed by a student and supervisor for a time-limited training experience that fits with the student’s particular training needs. The process for such a practicum includes: a) submission of the Student Specific Practicum Request Form to the CCT, and b) review of the request by the Practicum Committee for approval prior to beginning the practicum.

References

Hatcher, R., & Lassiter, K. (2004). *Report on practicum competencies*. Document available on the Web.

Hatcher, R. L., & Lassiter, K. D. (2007). Initial training in professional psychology: The practicum competencies outline. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 1(1), 49-63.