

THE COUNSELOR INTERN'S HANDBOOK

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COUNSELOR
INTERN'S
HANDBOOK

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John Carroll University



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*To our families,
friends, mentors, and students*



A CLAIREMONT BOOK

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P R E F A C E

This basic guide is designed to assist counseling students and others in the helping professions through the entire experience of internship, often the last requirement of a degree program. We include overviews of basic treatment modalities, psychological testing, and psychopharmacology, as well as chapters on the clinical interview and ethical considerations, subjects that are particularly relevant to interns. Our fields are counseling and psychology, yet students in related areas of the behavioral sciences may find the book helpful.

Among us we have supervised field placement students in a variety of settings for more than 40 years, so we are able to maintain a practical perspective in this book. Our varied backgrounds include teaching, administration, and clinical work; one of us recently completed the internship. We encourage students to review what they have learned while they progress to new material. We explain the components of internship in detail, and urge students to use them with enthusiasm as well as caution. It is important to leave no stone unturned during the internship process, but we provide only the stones, respecting the student's responsibility for the turning.

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We encourage your comments. Please write to us at Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 511 Forest Lodge Road, Pacific Grove, California 93950.

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CHAPTER ONE

GETTING STARTED

Your internship is generally the culmination of the academic sequence leading to your degree in counseling. It is an exciting, challenging time, and many students anticipate it with mixed emotions. Internship students often find themselves facing unfamiliar situations, engaging in intense encounters, and processing powerful feelings, which all lead to increased introspection, personal reassessment, change, and growth. The internship may be your first opportunity to interact independently with real clients in a professional capacity as a counselor, as well as your first experience in submitting those interactions to scrutiny during a formal supervisory hour. The material presented in this book is intended to be used as a step-by-step guide that will take some of the anxiety out of your internship and allow you to relax and enjoy the many rewarding, wonderful moments you are about to experience as a counselor intern.

Ideally, your internship should provide you with a supportive, structured learning environment for acquiring clinical experience and practical on-the-job training. You will be called on to synthesize material from previous coursework, to utilize theories and techniques, and to begin to develop a personal and professional style of relating effectively to clients, clients' families, agency staff members, and other mental health professionals.

During your counseling internship, you will work under the direct supervision of a licensed counselor, social worker, psychologist, or psychiatrist. You will meet for regular supervisory sessions to review your internship experience, as specified by your state licensure/certification board. Ideally, your field placement supervisor should be an experienced clinician who will provide a flexible learning experience tailored to meet your individual needs by giving you encouragement and ongoing assessments of your strengths and weaknesses as well as asking for your feedback. The actual number of hours you spend in direct contact with clients, as well as the total number of supervisory hours, should always fulfill state licensure/certification requirements. For example, the Ohio State Counselor and Social Worker Board specifies that one quarter of the internship hours be spent in direct client contact and that the intern should have one hour of supervision for every 20 hours of work. That would mean that a graduate student fulfilling a 600-hour internship would need 150

hours of client contact and 30 hours of supervision to have the internship qualify toward state licensure.

In addition to on-site experience and supervision, you will most likely participate in on-campus class meetings with other interns to discuss your placement experiences. Most students appreciate this group time with their peers to share their feelings, their frustrations, and their accomplishments, and find the support this group offers to be especially helpful during their internships. You may also meet with a supervisor from your counseling program (usually one of the department or program professors) for further processing of your individual experiences. You will typically be required to keep a detailed log or journal of daily on-site activities and to prepare two or more formal case studies for class presentation. Additional research projects or reading relevant to counseling may be assigned, as well. The agency supervisor and the program supervisor will evaluate your performance and potential as a counselor, and ideally they will discuss their evaluations with you midway through the internship and again at completion of the experience.

SELECTING YOUR INTERNSHIP SITE

Selecting your placement site is the first, and perhaps the most important, step in your internship experience. The selection process ideally involves integrating four factors:

1. your own interests and needs;
2. the field placement guidelines of your university counseling or human services program;
3. the state requirements for on-the-job experience for professional counseling licensure/certification; and
4. the didactic and experiential opportunities afforded at the placement site.

These four factors are interdependent, and the selection of a placement site is a dynamic process of exploring and matching these various criteria to find a good fit. Some counseling and human services programs have formal placement relationships with preapproved agencies, which may limit selection to a certain extent, but which may also help to provide a satisfactory field experience. Other programs delegate most of the responsibility for securing field placements to the individual student. In either case, you should first try to determine your own interests, needs, and expectations when you begin the process of choosing a placement site.

Your Interests and Needs

You may already have a fairly good idea about what types of people you do, or do not, enjoy working with (for example, children, adolescents, adults, or the elderly) and what kinds of problems you would, or would not, like to deal

with (for example, substance abuse, child and family concerns, career counseling, or mental health issues such as depression and anxiety). Knowledge about your own preferences helps give you some direction when you begin looking for an internship site, because you can limit your choices to those places where you are certain that you have a keen interest in agency clients and services. You may also opt to use your internship as an opportunity to try something new, to deepen your self-awareness and to enlarge your scope of experience. For example, if you have been working with abused children but have not had any helping interactions with chemically dependent adults, your internship may provide a chance to obtain practice in a different area.

Agencies can have client types and services that are either homogeneous (such as drug and alcohol treatment centers or child welfare agencies) or heterogeneous (such as community mental health centers or psychiatric hospital units). If you are unsure about your interests, or if you do not have a preference for working with one type of client or one particular type of problem, then you may do well to consider heterogeneous internship sites, which will offer you a wider range of experience.

In beginning the selection process, you should also consider whether an inpatient or an outpatient setting would satisfy more of your needs and interests. The hospital inpatient setting will typically be fast-paced and high-pressured, with a rapid client turnover. If you select a psychiatric inpatient unit for your internship, you will most likely come into contact with a great many clients, most of whom are in acute distress and are manifesting serious psychopathology. Working with the psychiatric inpatient is similar to crisis intervention in that your counseling relationship and interventions serve to help the client stabilize and return to a prior level of functioning. The hospital unit affords you the opportunity to interact with other health and mental health professionals as a member of an interdisciplinary treatment team, as well as to learn to relate to clients who have complicated psychiatric disorders, and these experiences are valuable and interesting. However, the intensity of the emotional upset and the extent of the problematic behaviors encountered in a hospital inpatient unit may not be suitable for all counseling students.

Long-term residential treatment facilities provide clients who generally have chronic, rather than acute, problems or difficult management issues and require a more structured or supportive environment. One advantage of this type of internship is the extended counseling relationship that you may develop with your clients, who are likely to remain at the facility throughout your placement. In addition, you may have special opportunities to observe, learn about, and interact with your clients as they go about their daily activities. An internship at a long-term treatment center for children or adolescents can be particularly rewarding in these respects.

If you choose an outpatient setting, your internship experience will vary according to the particular agency. Some agencies may offer you the chance to work as a member of an interdisciplinary team and to participate in treatment conferences, whereas at other agencies you may be interacting only with your supervisor to discuss cases. Most community mental health centers are mandated by law to provide services in such areas as intake assessment,

emergency care, consultation and education, research and evaluation, individual and group counseling, and after-care planning. The outpatient setting will usually, but not always, serve clients who are less distressed and less acute than those in the inpatient unit. As an intern in an outpatient center, you may have more opportunities to use a variety of counseling techniques, because the clients are generally higher functioning and are able to cope more effectively with daily living tasks. However, if you work in the intake or emergency department of the community mental health center, you may be dealing with highly upset clients or clients in crisis, who may require immediate hospitalization. In addition, many of your clients may have chronic problems or be “repeaters” who require continued support and management.

Another aspect of your internship needs may involve financial considerations. At some agencies interns are paid for their services; however, these sites will be limited and therefore your choices will be somewhat restricted if you require financial compensation during your internship. Unfortunately, a great many excellent internships are unpaid positions. We have found that some agencies will hire graduate counseling students to perform a paid job, such as case manager or mental health technician, and then allow the student to set aside a designated number of unpaid hours specified as internship hours, when the student assumes tasks and responsibilities relevant to the internship. Some students find this arrangement satisfactory, whereas others report that they are frustrated with their limited counseling and supervised time.

You may also want to consider whether a particular agency’s schedules will mesh with your own needs. For example, some agencies offer group therapy sessions on several evenings during the week, which may conflict with your personal responsibilities.

Your Counseling Program Guidelines

As you begin exploring possible internships, be certain that your potential site fulfills all requirements of your counseling program. Most programs provide a clear, printed set of guidelines listing the expectations and regulations for student internships. For example, your counseling program guidelines may specify that interns acquire experience in treatment planning, in individual and group counseling, in case management, and in discharge planning, as well as gaining an understanding of agency administrative procedures. You should be sure that you will be able to satisfy all the necessary program requirements at each internship site. In addition, make certain to determine whether you are covered by malpractice insurance provided by your program. Your counseling program guidelines should specify whether or not students are covered. If you need to purchase malpractice insurance, professional organizations such as the American Counseling Association (ACA) provide coverage at reduced rates for students.

State Licensure/Certification Requirements

Most state counselor licensure/certification boards allow credit for supervised hours accrued during your internship, even before completion of your graduate program in counseling. However, there are specific rules and regulations concerning, for example, whether your experience may be paid or unpaid, the hours and nature of supervision, the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, and the intern's scope of practice. In addition, all state boards have formal procedures and policies for registering supervised counseling experience. As soon as you begin selecting an internship site, you should write or call your state counseling regulatory board to obtain all documents, applications, and instructions pertaining to counselor licensure/certification. Then read through everything carefully and consider whether you will be able to fulfill state requirements for supervised counseling experience at each internship site. In addition, once you have selected a site, make sure to follow through on all formal procedures to register your hours with your state board, so that you can get credit toward state licensure or certification for your internship.

Experiential and Didactic Opportunities of Each Site

Your internship is a critical part of the preparation for your career as a professional counselor, and you should carefully examine and analyze what kinds of educational opportunities you will be likely to experience at each potential site. Will you be having direct client contact, such as doing intake assessments and conducting individual or group counseling, or will much of your time be spent “running errands,” such as filing papers and operating the copying machine? Will you be treated as a colleague and a valued member of the treatment team, or will the other professionals discount your input because you are “only a student”? Will you have the support you need, and will other staff members be willing to answer questions and offer help if you ask? Will you be invited to attend selected staff meetings and to participate in in-service educational sessions?

Your prospective supervisor will be responsible, in large part, for delineating your internship activities. Therefore, you should give thoughtful consideration to those personal and professional qualities you would hope to find in this individual. Your supervisor also must have the time, the interest, and the commitment to teaching interns, plus an understanding of the very special nature of the supervisory relationship.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

As you begin the process of selecting your internship, you will need to assemble a list of potential sites. You may already have some thoughts about where you would like to do your internship. However, if you have no idea where to