PSYCHOLOGY - 3I06

PRACTICUM

TO: Supervisors and Students of Psychology 3I06

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To see the list of practicum supervisors and their project descriptions click here.

NOTE: Please note that the Practicum is now a full year course (6, not 3, units)

The practicum course has evolved over the past few years and as new faculty supervisors are added to the list each year, I have become aware that we need some written guidelines. In general the course has run very well over the past years, but some problems are beginning to surface. Below I offer some guidelines and general information about the course.

PURPOSE: The practicum course was originally planned to provide an opportunity for the best of our Honours undergraduates to work in an applied setting. Because we wanted these settings to cover both clinical and applied research project, we offered no description of what constituted an acceptable project. Rather, Dr. Chuck Cunningham and I have attempted to match interests of students with settings and faculty known to us. This has worked well and we will continue to do this. One problem that has arisen from time to time is that the ‘contract’ between the practicum student and the faculty supervisor has been too vague, or has been changed without clear agreement from the student, and disagreements have been brought to the department. To minimize these disagreements, I suggest the following:

To the Students. You must understand that the placements cover a wide variety of settings and responsibilities. Some students may be asked to do ‘more work’ than others. This should be of no concern to you. This is NOT a structured course; it is a learning opportunity for you. You get out of it what you put into it. Part of the learning experience is to negotiate a working contract that meets your needs and the time YOU are able and willing to commit to this course. This contract should be in place at the beginning of September and must be in writing. In it there should be a short description of the project aims, of your tasks and responsibilities, and a clear statement of the number of contact hours with clients or research participants that will be expected. Make sure you have a clear picture of the time line for completing the project. Be aware that in ANY applied project flexibility is required. Clients or participants don't materialize as expected, or new real world constraints require that a supervisor abandon or radically change the project on which you are working. When those changes occur, it is your job to meet with the supervisor to form a new plan to complete the course. If you cannot reach an agreement with the supervisor, please contact me BEFORE the end of the course. It is too late to solve a difficulty in April. Please realize that we must hold you responsible for decisions you make. If they are bad ones, I can’t ‘fix’ that in April. This course offers you an opportunity to work as a team member; your individual desires must be balanced with the needs of the team. The supervisors voluntarily offer these placements; they are not paid to do this task; they offer the placements because they like to work with students and they believe they can help you to further your educational goals. All they receive in return is the products of your efforts. PLEASE MAKE US PROUD OF YOU!!! Next years students will benefit from renewed placement opportunities if you do a good job. We may loose a supervisor if you do not.

Requirements:
1. Make a written contract with your supervisor and file it with me by OCT. 15.

2. Besides completing the project itself you MUST write a 20 page paper that contains library research on the topic of the project PLUS a description of the project itself. The library work is in addition to the time requirements of the placement. One copy of this paper MUST be submitted to me no later than APRIL 2. A second copy must be to the supervisor by that date. This paper is required by the department, not the supervisor, but the supervisor will grade the paper. The supervisor will submit a grade to the co-ordinator by April 12th, that is based on the paper and the supervisor's evaluation of the student's performance during the placement. While the co-ordinator may query any grade that appears 'deviant' in the distribution of grades, the final mark of the supervisor stands until it is changed by the supervisor.

Please note that I am more than happy to advise you on any aspect of the placement and on any difficulties that arise during the placement. You must remember that these independent learning experiences place the burden on you to ensure adequate contact with the supervisor. These supervisors are very busy people. They are not on campus and as readily available for meetings, as the department's faculty. Make sure your contract has a clear statement on how often and when you will meet the supervisor. If there is an assistant or resident who supervises the day-to-day placement activities, still make sure that there are regular meetings with the supervisor. It is best to specify these in the contract.

Over the past years the vast majority of placements have been enjoyable and beneficial learning opportunities for the students. I hope your will be even more than you hoped for! Good Luck and WORK HARD!

**To The Supervisors.** We sincerely thank you for agreeing to supervise our students in this practicum course. Over the past years our students have raved about the experiences you have provided for them. Now that we are developing some 'feel' for the types of practicum experiences being provided, I think it may be time to set down some guidelines so that major disagreements between students and supervisors do not arise. Please let me know if you disagree with any of the suggestions to students that are outlined above. Over the years I have discovered that our students are not well versed in negotiation skills. They agree to what they don't understand or even to what they don't want! I think they need help in learning to fend for themselves. To that end, and because it also protects the supervisor in cases of appeals, I have asked each student to form a clear contract with the supervisor, that is to be signed by the supervisor and student and filed with me by October 15. Any changes in this agreement should also be submitted to me in writing so that I know that everyone understands the end product of the placement. At the end of this memo I have appended a suggested contract form that can be used. Feel free to change it in any way to meet your needs. I hope this contract is not seen as a departmental intervention in your work. It is really meant to be a learning tool and a written form of 'protection' for faculty.

There have been few complaints about the practicum course. In fact it receives rave reviews by the students. However, each year a few problems arise and our students often handle them poorly. I want you to know about the difficulties that arise. I also realized that as we add supervisors I have often failed to offer specific guidelines on what is expected in this course. I hope this memo will assist you in forming contracts that are mutually beneficial.

When Dr. Cunningham and I first proposed this course to the department, we hoped that the practicum experiences could be tied to the theoretical and empirical work that the students cover in their course. That is not always possible but it still is an aim. We would like the students to see 'psychology in action', particularly where principles and theoretical views are being tested or used to solve practical problems. For this reason, one of the requirements of the course is a 20 page paper that should include library research on the topic under study. We want the students to understand the etiology of the problem, and what is known about treatment, as well as understand the approach you take to it. That is, we hope to have an academic basis for each practical experience. We hope each supervisor will guide the student in this academic, library work and that you will meet with them to discuss these aspects of the project, as well as the project work itself.

While we view the practicum as a form of self-directed learning, you should be aware that our students have little or no experience with this form of learning. They will need considerable guidance and structure to get into the problem space. They also will need help with design, statistics etc. All of our Honours students have a year-long course in mathematical statistics, but few have had experience with computer packages or with multivariate statistics. Experiences in lab courses and the thesis course lead me to advise you that the students will need direction in what statistics to use and in how to use many tests. Also most of the students will have little or no knowledge of standardized tests. Again, these students must be seen as apprentices who learn quickly, but who
must receive guidance. The major source of unhappiness for undergraduates in the practicum course has been lack of contact with the supervisor and lack of specific instruction from the person who is in charge of the day-to-day supervision. It would be helpful to set a specific meeting time on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to meet your student or students. That way, the student will always have an opportunity to seek advise and to air problems they have encountered.

The other source of difficulty centers on the time requirements. This is now a 6-unit course. As a rough guideline on time commitment, this course should take the equivalent of one day per week for each of the 2 terms. Those 26 or so days can be distributed across the year. However, it is critical that you and the student have a clear agreement on the time commitment to the project. If you require more time than this minimum 26 or so days, then specify that in a written contract. These Honours students have a heavy load so please be reasonable! The paper should be done outside of this 26 day commitment. Please ensure that the students know what is expected, and over what time course, when they begin work on the project. If anything needs to be changed over the course of the project, please get agreement from the student on the changes.

The final paper is a departmental requirement. It must be submitted to me and to you on or before April 2. We cannot get extensions because most of the students are to be graduands in May and the marks must go to the Dean one week after the end of classes. The student should give one copy of the paper to me and another one to you. Please arrange to return your marked copy to the student. A final grade based on the paper plus your evaluation of the performance during the project should be submitted to me (e-mail or voice mail is ok) by April 9th. I will NOT alter your mark, but if it seems ‘deviant’ from the norm I may ask you why, so I can answer any queries from the administration. The department values your judgments and we hope that you will maintain a rigorous standard that we try to use internally. There is a tendency to assign an A in individual study courses. Most of these are deserved but we hope that discriminations based on ‘job’ performance and written performance will be made.

Finally, thank you again for your commitment of time and talent for the benefit of our undergraduates. I hope the 'contract' idea will cause no difficulty. Please send me suggestions on how to improve the course.

HAVE FUN!

PRACTICUM CONTRACT: PSYCHOLOGY 3I06

1. Brief description of project.
2. Expected contact hours with clients or participants. How will these be distributed over a term or the year?

3. Meetings with supervisor: Times and places.

4. Personnel in charge of day-to-day supervision.

5. Students responsibilities:

Other comments on agreement

_________________________________  Supervisor
_________________________________

          Student