

CHAPTER 1

PREPARATION

Students: the underlines
~~are~~ are not necessarily
the only important parts!
This is my desk copy.

Please excuse all the
marks.

Dr. M-

I've learned more in this experience than I have in any of my classes. Every student should have the opportunity to do a practicum.

Every day there was something new that I realized I didn't know. If for no other reason than that, I'm glad I did an internship.

*Comments from student evaluations of their
practicum and internship experiences*

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Baseball
metaphor

A friend of mine who was working overseas in the Peace Corps decided it would be fun to teach the children of his village how to play baseball. The children were enthusiastic and eager to learn, so he rounded up some equipment; drew pictures of the playing field; explained the rules of the game; and had everyone practice throwing, catching, and hitting the ball. He even gave them a test that included questions about the number of balls and strikes allowed, how many outs per inning, the distance between bases, and famous players of the past. With the basics mastered, the class improvised a field in a nearby pasture, divided up into two teams, and prepared to play ball.

As the villagers looked on, the excited children took their places on the field. My friend, the teacher, asked the children if they were ready, and all assured him that they understood what to do. The leadoff batter, a wiry young boy of 13, looked nervous but determined. My friend surveyed the field and aligned his players. Then, taking an exaggerated windup, he delivered the first baseball pitch the village had ever witnessed.

To everyone's astonishment, the batter smacked the ball into deep left field. The batter was so shocked by this that he just stood watching as the teacher shouted for him to "Run, Run, Run!" Turning to see how his team fared as fielders, my friend found that all of his players had left their positions and were running as fast as they could around the bases, tagging each one, screaming, laughing, and heading for home plate. The ball, meanwhile, rolled to a stop far out in the field with no one making any effort to chase it.

When the commotion subsided, my friend was the only player left on the field. All of his team, even the batter, had raced from the field to home, thrilled with how many runs they believed

they had just scored. "Somewhere," my friend declared to himself, "we've got a gap between theory and practice." With that, he ran for first base and raced around the diamond just as his players had. When he crossed home plate, he made baseball history by scoring the tenth run from a single hit. His students loved it, and the village still talks about the game today.

Students beginning their first practicum or field placement can identify with my friend's players. Enthusiasm, nervousness, determination, and uncertainty will be familiar feelings (Gelman, 2004; Gelman & Lloyd, 2008; Hill, Sullivan, Knox, & Schlosser, 2007). Regardless of all the coursework and study, there is no substitute for real experience. Only by getting out there and trying things can we discover what we do or do not know.

This is why field placements are so valuable. They give you the chance to experience firsthand what you have been learning in your readings and classes. You will quickly discover that reading in a textbook about schizophrenia, alcoholism, child abuse, or other issues is not the same as meeting and interacting with real people who experience the situations or conditions you have studied. Similarly, reading about, or role-playing, therapy and counseling techniques in a classroom differs greatly from participating in actual therapy sessions.

You will also discover that many things you need to know in the "real world," such as ethical and legal issues, how to write case notes, how to deal with supervision, and a host of other topics, may not have been addressed sufficiently in your academic classes. Even when subjects have been studied in class, as my friend learned from his base-running fielders, instructors too often assume that students will be able to transfer what they learn in the classroom directly to the field. Students recognize the error of this assumption the moment they enter their internship and ask themselves, "Now what do I do?" My goal in writing this book is to help you answer that question.

TERMINOLOGY

FIELD PLACEMENTS, PRACTICUMS, OR INTERNSHIPS?

Because this text deals with issues that are common across multiple disciplines and for students at various levels of study and

training, a brief word about terminology is in order. Different disciplines use different terminologies to describe field learning experiences, and the terms depend on the level of the student's training. For example, social work programs often refer to learning opportunities beyond the classroom as "field placements" or "field experiences" (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2001; Gelman, 2004). Psychology and counseling use "practicum" to describe field experiences early in one's career and "internship" for more advanced field training (American Psychological Association Committee on Accreditation, 2005; American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2009; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2009; Hatcher, Grus, & Wise, 2011; Hatcher & Lassiter, 2007). While recognizing and respecting the terminology differences across disciplines and levels of training, for simplicity, we will use the word *internship* in this text, primarily because it happens to carry the convenient noun *intern*, which describes the individual receiving training. Thus, throughout the text, except where direct quotations are cited, all field experiences, regardless of discipline or level of training, will be called internships, and all those receiving training will be referred to as interns.

SUPERVISORS AND INSTRUCTORS

With the exception of the final internship training for advanced graduate students, in most internship experiences students will be under the guidance of persons in two different roles. *Instructors* are faculty from the student's educational institution who monitor the student's progress and interface with those employed by the field placement site. Those who directly monitor and direct the student's work at the placement site are referred to as *supervisors*.

All field placements are part of students' overall academic training (Wayne, 2004), and they should work closely with both their academic instructor and their field supervisor. Although the amount of direct contact students have with instructors or supervisors will vary from program to program and across placements, throughout this text I will emphasize repeatedly that both instructors and supervisors should be kept closely informed of the intern's activities and should be notified of any questions, concerns, or problems that develop.

MEETING WITH YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Your first task as an intern is to meet with the academic instructor who will work with you during your internship. Some academic programs offer structured classes along with internships. Other programs leave internship support or supervision to be arranged individually between students and instructors (Hatcher et al., 2011). In either case, initial contact with an instructor is vital for a number of reasons.

The most important reason is to ensure that you receive the best possible educational experience from your internship.

Instructors can help you select placements or supervisors best suited to your needs, and they may assist in making contact with placement sites or individual supervisors. If your department has established procedures governing internships, meeting with your instructor right at the outset will ensure that you follow those procedures. You may need to complete some paperwork before you begin an internship and fulfill certain requirements to receive credit or a grade for your internship.

An additional concern that many interns do not consider is the liability risks that instructors and supervisors face when their students work in the field (National Association of Social Work Insurance Trust, 2004; Pollack & Marsh, 2004; Zakutansky & Sirles, 1993). Given this shared liability, the faculty in your department must be involved in all aspects of your internship, from the very beginning until the conclusion.

Students should also be aware that it can take a great deal of effort on the part of instructors and supervisors to establish a relationship with various internship sites (Cornish, Smith-Acuña, & Nadkarni, 2005). Many programs have a fixed set of placement sites and long-established relationships with the supervisors of their students. Such arrangements ensure that the academic program will have placements for students and, simultaneously, that the treatment agencies can rely on interns to help them carry their workload. Students who might wish for greater autonomy or flexibility in placement settings sometimes find this frustrating, but it should be remembered that having well-established placement sites with experienced supervisors is certainly preferable to situations in which adequate placement sites or supervisors cannot be arranged at all.

Research and reports from the field of social work (Bogo, 2005; Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2006) have shown that changes in health care and academia are making it harder to find field placement sites willing to accept interns. Within academia, as a result of increasing pressures on faculty to produce research and cutbacks in the number of faculty, the role of field liaison is being relegated to part-time faculty. Thus, the decision to accept an intern or establish an intern program within an agency is not one that is taken lightly by the agency or the supervisors and staff. Although this background work may not be transparent to you, it is worth keeping in mind how much time and effort goes into creating and maintaining placement opportunities for students.

FINDING AND SELECTING A PLACEMENT

As a result of the various approaches to selecting or assigning internships, some of the material that follows may not be equally relevant to all readers. If your academic program makes all the internship arrangements for students, you may skim or skip this section and move on to the discussion of establishing formal institutional and individual agreements. On the other hand, if your program provides little structure or support for its interns, the material that follows should help you find and choose the best placement for your interests and abilities.

Check these places

Have Bridgid do search

INSTRUCTORS, PEERS, AND CAMPUS RESOURCES FOR LOCATING INTERNSHIPS

Your academic instructors will generally be your primary source for internship recommendations. As discussed earlier, your first step in finding an internship should be to meet with the designated instructor responsible for internship courses. Your instructor will likely have a number of preapproved sites from which you can choose. She or he may also be able to give you specific recommendations based on your personal interests or training needs. Your instructor can also tell you if a particular site meets the requirements of your department and major. This is especially important because it would be unfortunate to select an internship or practicum, spend months working there, and then discover that the experience did not count for credit or would not be recognized by your professional association or department.

In addition to the resources of your instructor, many campuses have offices dedicated to coordinating field learning experiences. These often go by such names as "Cooperative Education" or "Community Learning" programs. Agencies with available internship positions typically send position announcements to these offices, which then post them for students. Even though you may not have heard of a program of this sort on your campus, check around to see if one is available.

One other campus resource to check is the career services or job placement center. You may be less likely to find internship openings there, but you should nevertheless become familiar with the services available through these offices. Internships provide an excellent opportunity to begin developing your job application file and honing the interview skills that you will need when you eventually apply for employment. Career service offices can help you develop those skills. They can also help you write a curriculum vitae or resume, and many offices will help you establish a complete job application file, including letters of reference and other material commonly requested by employers. These offices also receive regular announcements of position openings, so stop by periodically to see if they have received word of any openings in your subject area.

Peers or prior graduates are yet another source of information and may be able to offer insights not available from instructors or campus referral offices. Along with identifying placements to pursue, your peers may suggest places to avoid. Such information can be valuable, but keep in mind that another student's experiences will not necessarily match yours. Still, if a student advises that a certain internship amounted to little more than typing data into a computer or watching television on the midnight shift, you can predict that the placement may present limited learning opportunities.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Interns who look to faculty or campus resources sometimes overlook the many community resources available. Many communities have volunteer coordinating programs to help match

programs with volunteers. United Way sometimes supports such programs and has been involved in efforts to establish 2-1-1 call centers that connect people in need with resources and people seeking to volunteer with community opportunities. More information about 2-1-1 resources in general and those in your local area can be obtained at <http://www.211.org/>. Another resource that may be available locally is a telephone crisis line. These lines make referrals to programs of all kinds, and many have books listing different agencies. If there is a community mental health center in your area, call there, explain that you are a student seeking an internship, and ask whether they have openings or could provide lists of local agencies that you might contact.

Three other sources that can be helpful are Internet listings, newspapers, and phone books. On the Web, sites such as Craigslist have special listings for nonprofit jobs that often include positions in mental health and social services. In the newspaper, classified advertisements sometimes list position openings in agencies that also offer internships. Try looking in the Employment Offerings section under the headings "Counselor," "Mental Health," or "Therapist" or under your specific discipline's title. These may be listed alphabetically in the general section or in special sections for "Health Care" positions. The added benefit of finding positions this way is the possibility of locating a paid position for an internship. The disadvantage is that such positions may require more job experience than beginning interns have. Also, in some paid positions, it may be more difficult to find suitable supervision. That should not discourage you from calling to discuss a position. Interns often start a position as a student in an unpaid status but are later hired in a paid capacity as openings become available. If you inquire about a position that requires more experience than you have at present, do not be afraid to suggest working as an unpaid intern to gain the requisite experience.

National, state, and local professional associations also can be useful resources. Most organizations have membership directories that you can use to locate individuals working in settings or areas that interest you. Many professions maintain national catalogs listing available field training opportunities. These catalogs tend to be directed toward graduate training, but there are often opportunities for undergraduates as well.

INTERNATIONAL PLACEMENTS

As you are considering where you might like to seek an internship, do not be afraid to think outside your national borders. Students who have had the opportunity to work or study abroad often rate the experience as the most significant of all their educational activities. Most campuses have special study abroad offices that offer their expertise in locating international opportunities and assistance in navigating issues such as visas, insurance, and vaccinations.

If you do pursue an international placement, be sure to consider cultural and linguistic differences that may substantially

if not sure how

Possible gaps catalog page

alter how and why people seek and deliver certain mental health services in other countries. Do not assume that the helping and communication models you are familiar with at home will apply well or at all in another country and culture. You may also want to review some of the ethical and clinical issues associated with online supervision. These are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this book.

CHOOSING A PLACEMENT

Finding potential placements is the first step. The next step is to select an internship from among the possibilities. I encourage interns to approach this process thoughtfully because it is important that your first clinical experience be positive.

One way to determine what features to look for in an internship is to consider what other interns have found important in their selection process. The features that will be most important to you will depend on your program and your level of training, but surveys of interns have shown several key variables that influence decisions: the match of interests between the training site and the intern, the reputation of the training site, special training opportunities, the breadth of clinical populations available, location, quality of supervision, and the intern's gut feeling about the site. In addition to the variables just mentioned, you should also consider unique personal circumstances. For example, many graduate students are somewhat older, have families, and may be taking their coursework or internship on a part-time basis or in addition to other employment. For this group of students, scheduling flexibility may be especially important.

EXERCISE

To help you select an internship that best matches your needs, skills, and interests, take a moment to list key factors that will be important to you. Then rate each possible internship on each of these key factors. For example, you might list such factors as type of setting, clients served, treatment approaches, and supervisor qualities. You might also list pragmatic considerations, such as location, compensation (if any), hours, and flexibility. Once you have done this for yourself, I suggest that you share your assessment with a peer and with your instructor to get their feedback about what you have included or what you might want to add.

After you have given some thought to the features that are most important to your own interests, the next step involves matching those interests with the internships available. Appendices A and B in this text provide forms I have developed to help gather information about placement sites. On one form, interns list their interests, experience, available times, and other information relevant to internship selection. The parallel form presents agency information, such as location, types of clients, treatment approaches, supervision, and available days and times.

Comparing information from the intern and agency allows instructors, students, and the agency to make informed decisions about the suitability of a given placement for a specific intern. Such information may also reduce the likelihood of placements not working.

To supplement the information provided in Appendices A and B, Appendix K provides a form that interns can use to evaluate their placements at the end of their experience. Some programs make these evaluations available to other students (typically with individual identifying information removed or edited) so that students seeking placements can read what their predecessors have reported about their opportunities and experiences at a particular site. If such reports are available, you might want to read those from various internships before making a selection for yourself.

SUPERVISION

Although many interns select placements based on clients served, location, treatment approach, or other considerations, perhaps the most important factor to consider involves the professionals who will work with you and provide supervision. Particularly in more advanced internships, the quality of the internship experience is closely related to the quality of the supervision received.

Interns who are selecting placements need to ask this basic question about a supervisor: "Is this someone I think I can work with and who will be interested in helping me learn?" In answering this question, consider the supervisor's personality, professional qualifications, and areas of interest, as well as the likelihood that this person will give you sufficient supervision time and instruction.

In selecting a supervisor, also consider compatibility of clinical philosophy or approach. Many interns broaden their views and become more confident when working with supervisors whose theoretical orientations differ from their own, but others have experienced significant conflicts. Although placement with a supervisor with a different orientation can be stimulating, if either the supervisor or the intern is dogmatic and intolerant of differing views, it can leave both feeling frustrated and discouraged.

The best way to get to know potential supervisors is to schedule a meeting or phone interview with them. Remember that in this meeting, both of you will be evaluating how well an internship together would work. Supervisors will want to know about your academic training and practical experiences. They will also be interested in your personality, character, and skills. Can they rely on you? Are you diligent in your work? Will you take suggestions or instructions well? And will it be in some way worth the supervisor's time to work with you?

On your part, it is a good idea to do a bit of background work, perhaps by consulting the agency website or doing an Internet search for information about the placement setting and your potential supervisor. Once you both meet, you will be asking some of the same questions the supervisor asks about you. You will be interested in this person's professional experience

for internship meeting

and in any specific training or experience as a supervisor. You will also want to know if the supervisor will be a good teacher, someone who lets you take some risks and make mistakes in the process of learning but who also is there with guidance and support when you need them. I recommend that students ask specific questions about a potential supervisor's education, training, and experience in supervision. Questions about the supervisor's philosophy and approach to the role can also be helpful.

Finally, ask how much time the supervisor has to spend with you. One of the most common frustrations interns describe about their experience is lack of availability or time with their supervisor. To avoid this, before you reach the stage of formalizing your arrangement, be certain the supervisor can devote sufficient time to working with you.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Along with identifying a supervisor with whom you would like to do an internship, also consider the kinds of learning opportunities that will be available to you and clarify your role before starting an internship. The lack of sufficiently interesting or challenging learning opportunities is one of the most common causes of complaints and frustration among interns. It is not unusual for interns to select what appear to be ideal placements only to discover that all they are allowed to do is code data for research, help with reorganizing files, or "babysit" students while teachers or counselors are out of the room. Knowing from the outset what opportunities you desire and what the internship can and will make available will avoid such disappointments.

In your first internship, most of the focus will be on learning by observing. This means you should have the opportunity to observe many different elements of the activities at your placement. Ideally, interns should have some opportunity to observe everything that goes on, from staff meetings and paperwork to direct treatment and other service delivery. This gives interns the broadest exposure to all elements of the placement. It is important for interns to know both the rewarding and the mundane aspects of the profession. If it is your first field experience, you should remember that for your benefit and that of clients, you will likely be given only very limited responsibilities to begin with.

As your abilities and training allow, you will gradually go beyond observational learning and begin to accept responsibility in clinical activities. This must be closely coordinated with the supervisor, but your goal should be to take new challenges in stages, pushing yourself slightly each time but never extending beyond your level of competence. Again, if you hope to have a certain kind of experience on your internship, check with potential placements and supervisors to determine whether that experience will be available to you.

TREATMENT APPROACHES

Internships provide your best opportunity to experience firsthand what a therapy or technique that appeals to you in theory is like

in actual practice. If you have a particular interest in a treatment approach, you may want to seek a placement where you can receive supervision and experience in that approach.

If you already have experience in one intervention approach, consider seeking training in a completely different one. This does not mean you must become a convert to the other approach. It merely suggests that you should be open to different methods and give them a try to see what there is to learn from another perspective. When interns actually experience a different approach in practice, those who may have once been quite critical come to recognize that each method has something useful to offer.

CLIENTS

The next factor to consider in selecting a placement is the client base served by the program. Just as it is advisable for interns to be exposed to a variety of treatment approaches, experience with diverse client groups is also desirable. In your first internship, the exact makeup of the client population is less important than that you are out in the real world working with people. Still, there is nothing wrong with seeking a placement based on the type of client served. If you want to eventually work with a specific client group, it might be ideal to find a placement with a program for that group.

In my own training, I sought opportunities to work with clients of virtually all ages and diagnostic groups. By selecting a series of internship and practicum placements, I was eventually able to work with clients ranging from very young children to elderly adults and with diagnostic groups ranging from college students in a counseling center to patients in a unit for mentally ill criminal offenders. In each placement, I learned something new and expanded both my awareness and my skills. This diversity of experience also helped me gain a clearer sense of the kinds of therapy and clients I was most interested in and for which my skills were best suited.

PROGRAMS AND SETTINGS

Theoretical approaches and client types are frequently foremost on interns' minds when they select internships, but you should also consider the different kinds of internship settings available. For example, although the ages of the clients may be similar, an internship in a school setting is likely to differ in many ways from an internship in a home for runaway adolescents. Similarly, although many of the clients served and treatment techniques found in mental health clinics may be similar to those in inpatient facilities, some important characteristics will be specific to each setting. Thus, apart from the clients served and the treatment approaches used, if you have experience in only one kind of setting, a placement in a completely different setting could be very educational.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Because so much of the focus of practicums and internships is on clinical experience, it is easy to overlook the opportunities

field training can provide for hands-on research experience. Especially for students in master's- or doctoral-level programs who must complete theses or dissertations, and for pre-graduate-level students seeking to continue their studies, it is a good idea to explore how supportive of research activities a placement may be and what opportunities it offers to be involved in research.

CAREER PLANS

Most interns should avoid premature specialization, but this does not mean you should completely ignore your career plans when you choose an internship. This is particularly important if you hope to seek employment or further education in the field soon after you complete your internship. Interns who are about to enter the job market or go on to further studies often desire placement sites that make them more marketable to potential employers or graduate schools.

If your career or academic plans are not yet clear, you may want to discuss any career or educational questions with your instructor before you choose an internship. You could also review any current publications about careers in your chosen field. These are often published by and available through your professional organization. By getting a sense of your interests and the feasible options, you can better select an internship that gives you the experience to make decisions about future career directions.

PRACTICAL ISSUES: LOCATION AND TIMES

The issues addressed thus far have primarily been concerned with the nature and quality of the clinical experience and training you will receive. More mundane, but not to be overlooked, are such practical considerations as where the placement is located and how your available days and times match those of the placement site. Particularly for students who are trying to juggle obligations of parenting, work, and academic classes with an internship, it will be important to match the internship placement expectations with other scheduling needs.

If you can, try to pick readily accessible placement sites. This will allow you to spend more time at the placement site and less time in transit. In some areas, you should also consider safety factors associated with getting to and from a placement. Wherever you find an internship, it is a good idea to ask your supervisor and other staff members about any safety issues associated with the location. Some areas assumed to be "terribly dangerous" are really not so if you take a few precautions. Do not be embarrassed to express any concerns or to ask your coworkers for their suggestions.

It is important for interns to be on their placement site at regularly scheduled times—ideally, a minimum of two to three hours a day for at least three days per week. Interns who are on site at irregular or infrequent times do not fully integrate into the routine of the placement. Unless interns are present on a regular basis, staff and clients are unlikely to be sufficiently comfortable or confident with them to involve them in activities. Keep in

mind, too, that insofar as the internship serves as preparation for employment, dependable attendance is a key way to demonstrate employment readiness.

As you consider your schedule and make arrangements with an internship placement, be as realistic as possible about the times you will be available. Many interns do not heed this advice and overextend themselves because they have a great desire to learn and will try to do whatever their placement agencies ask. The motivation to learn is admirable, but if you extend yourself too far, you may end up disappointing yourself and the agency.

If academic and other time demands severely limit the time available for the internship or if your schedule is so variable that you cannot set aside consistent times for the internship, consider doing the internship at some other time or perhaps changing the other elements of your schedule to better accommodate the internship. It is better to postpone an internship than to try to force one into an overcrowded schedule and have a bad experience.

COMPETENCE AND SAFETY

The final consideration here is by no means the least important. When you select an internship, carefully consider your level of ability and training in relation to the tasks you will be expected to perform. An internship should stretch your knowledge and skills, but you must not extend your responsibilities to a point that would be dangerous to yourself or your clients. If you are concerned about personal safety at an internship, you may want to read Chapter 9 now and discuss any safety concerns with your instructor and supervisor. So too, if the kinds of clients served or the technical demands of treatment, assessment, or other services are beyond your current abilities, you need to recognize this and discuss any limitations fully with your instructor and supervisor before you begin a placement.

PREPARING YOUR INTERNSHIP APPLICATION

As you consider which internship sites best match your interests, keep in mind that the people at those sites are also looking for specific qualities in applicants. Suggestions and tips about selecting and applying to internship sites are offered later in this chapter and can also be found in Madson, Aten, and Leach (2007).

You can take several steps to prepare in advance and improve your chances of being accepted wherever you decide to apply. Two key elements are preparation of letters of application and recommendation and practice for the interview. Given the importance assigned to clinical writing and the frequency with which supervisors express concerns about deficiencies in their interns' writing skills, you may also want to review Chapter 7, which addresses clinical writing and case notes. Another good source of suggestions for writing applications and interview preparation is the workbook produced by the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (Williams-Nickelson, Prinstein, & Keilin, 2008). Although written for

graduate-level psychology students, the suggestions about letters, interviews, and other application procedures apply well across disciplines.

LETTERS OF APPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Your application letter and supportive letters of recommendation are two key areas in which you can strengthen your application.

In your own letter of application, it is important to tell something about yourself that is not simply a reiteration of your curriculum vitae but will help you stand out in some way to the reader. This might be a noteworthy personal experience or achievement of some kind. Based on my own experience reviewing applications, I find that such personal elements often serve as important mnemonics that help selection committees recall and distinguish individuals. For example, a member of a committee discussing applicants might say something like, "Isn't that the person who played in the band?" or "I liked the one who had volunteered in Guatemala." As you write your own application, think about what might help you stand out in addition to your academic achievements, research, and clinical and other experiences.

In describing yourself, it is also a good idea to be honest about not only what you consider to be your strengths but also about areas you hope to develop further. A mix of accurate self-confidence with sincere humility and a desire to learn are desirable qualities in letters and in interns themselves. Letters that are too self-aggrandizing or self-deprecating tend to raise red flags.

Along with describing you, your letter should address your specific reasons for seeking the particular internship and mention specific goals you hope to achieve while there. Showing that a particular site matters to you in some specific way demonstrates that you have done your homework about where you are applying and that you have a personal interest and commitment to that location. This goes a long way to help a site select between students who are looking for just any placement versus those who are seeking that particular placement.

Just as you give attention to writing your own letters, I suggest you also give some time to helping others write letters of recommendation on your behalf. When asking someone to serve as a reference, be sure to give plenty of advance notice and make his or her task as easy and convenient as possible. Always ask permission in person before giving a name as a reference. When you provide written material, such as recommendation forms, it is a courtesy to complete as much of the form as you can, leaving only the evaluative sections for the reference source to complete. Also provide preaddressed, stamped envelopes along with notes indicating how and when the letter should be sent (e.g., some programs request that the outside of the envelope be signed over the seal). Follow-up inquiries a week before the due date are usually welcomed and are considered a courtesy. After someone has written a letter on your behalf, be sure to send a note of thanks and let the person know the result of your application process.

INTERVIEWS

Most people do not realize it, but the key to an effective interview is what you do *before* the interview, not simply what happens *during* the interview. Careful preparation beforehand will substantially increase the likelihood of the interview going well; if you are well prepared, the actual interview will usually take care of itself.

As you prepare for an interview, begin by studying information about the prospective internship site. Know about the history of the site, something about the clients served and about the staff, especially the person with whom you will have the interview. Also make an effort to speak with other interns or staff to learn about the day-to-day operations of the site, what is expected of interns, and what opportunities are available. In addition to learning about the site, review your own qualifications so that you can confidently describe your experiences and what you have to contribute to the internship.

It is also extremely helpful to practice responding to questions the interviewer may ask you. This practice should not just be mental; have another person fill the role of the interviewer and ask you questions directly. You might even want to video the process so that afterward you can review the practice session and get feedback about both the content and the style of your responses. As you practice for an interview, be sure to have your portfolio ready and use it to illustrate your experiences and work products.

Some of the questions you are likely to be asked during an interview include the following: "Why are you applying to this particular internship site?" "What are your primary learning and training goals?" "What supervisory experiences are you seeking?" "What specific skills or abilities do you bring that make you well suited to the internship?" "What areas or skills do you believe you need to improve?" "What are your long-term career goals?"

In addition to answering specific questions, you may also need to respond to hypothetical case situations. A good strategy in such situations is to approach the task systematically. Begin by reviewing out loud the information you have just been given. Then, proceed through a step-by-step process of identifying what you would consider and why. In most cases, the goal in responding to such questions should not be to quickly arrive at the "right answer." Rather, it is to demonstrate that you are capable of careful, systematic, and informed reasoning. In this process, do not be afraid to ask for further details. The questions you choose to ask and how you ask them may be just as informative as the answers you give. The key is not so much to demonstrate what you would do, but to demonstrate how and why you reached that decision. Remember that it is perfectly acceptable to indicate an awareness of the need for consultation or assistance if a case is beyond your experience or knowledge.

A final element of interviews that applicants frequently overlook is sending a thank-you note a day or so after the interview. Interviewers will notice and appreciate this simple courtesy, and it is too often neglected.

EXERCISE

Perhaps do this at the internship meeting

Get together with a fellow student and prepare for an internship interview by asking each other the questions identified earlier. Each of you should role-play both the interviewer and the applicant. Try to video record the interactions so you can watch them later. If feasible, have a third person watch both of you to give constructive feedback. You may also want to meet with someone from your university's career service center and ask for help in preparing for a job interview. As with any skill, repeated practice will lead to further improvements, so practice the interview several times and with different people who ask slightly different questions each time.

Once you have located and selected an internship setting and found a supervisor willing to work with you, a formal agreement should be established to clarify the nature and details of your learning arrangement.

INTERNSHIP AGREEMENTS

Two types of agreements should be formalized before you begin an internship. The first is a written agreement between your academic institution and the internship site. Next, together with your instructor and supervisor, you need to formulate an agreement that describes the specific features and learning goals of your individual internship experience (Hatcher et al., 2011). Establishing such agreements in writing at the outset will help avoid later misunderstandings or confusion about what the internship site and supervisor expect of you and what you expect of them.

INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENTS

As society in general and health care in particular have become increasingly litigious, the need for formal and detailed internship agreements has grown. Wayne emphasized that for certain legal purposes, particularly for performance evaluations or disciplinary actions, field placements are treated by the courts like academic courses, thereby making it essential that programs have "clearly defined learning objectives and evaluation criteria that are known to the student, the field instructor and the faculty liaison at the start of the course" (Wayne, 2004, p. 409).

At the beginning of your internship, it is certainly reasonable to ask both your instructor and your field supervisor if a formal written arrangement exists and for you to have a chance to review it. Of course, you should not be responsible for drafting the agreement, but asking the questions may help spur action if explicit accords are lacking. If there are extant agreements, knowing with clarity from the outset what the expectations are between institutions can help prevent problems or misunderstandings down the road.

Because no two internship sites or academic programs are identical, there is no single model for such agreements. As a general rule, however, most institutions prefer agreements that begin by recognizing the importance, mutual benefits, and

shared responsibilities of field learning opportunities for the academic institutions, students, and field placement sites. This initial recognition is then typically followed by a description of the agreed-upon expectations for each of the parties involved. The expectations for the field setting include allowing the student to observe or participate in specified activities, providing certain kinds of learning opportunities, providing supervision by persons with specific qualifications and at specified intervals, and maintaining contact with the academic institution and instructor. Identifying the degree and other qualifications of the supervisor and specifying with clarity the number of hours spent on site and in supervision can be of particular importance as these may be required for formal credit or approval to be granted by professional associations and licensing boards (e.g., see CACREP, Standards, 2009).

For its part, the academic institution affirms in such agreements that the student is in good standing and has sufficient preparation to participate in the specified internship activities. The academic institution also agrees to provide a liaison instructor to work with the field setting. The agreement may also clarify the role of the instructor and address the evaluation process to be used. The student's responsibilities as described in such agreements include adhering to the professional code of ethics, attending the internship as scheduled, carrying out any agreed-on responsibilities, and informing the supervisor and instructor of any problems or concerns. Guidelines for dress and conduct and, again, a description of evaluation procedures are sometimes included in the description of the student's responsibilities.

Ask Now

Two of the most common areas of legal concerns covered in agreements are (1) the possibility that the intern might be involved in activities that injure or otherwise harm a client or other person at the internship site and (2) the possibility that the intern might be injured or otherwise harmed while at the internship site. Portions of the agreement that deal with these issues specify how responsibilities will be shared in the event of such incidents. This includes clarification of liability insurance.

The value of liability insurance for interns was demonstrated by Gelman, Pollack, and Auerbach (1996), who found that 2.3% of programs reported that one of their students, and in five of six cases the supervising faculty member as well, had been named in liability cases. In light of this finding, it is certainly advisable for more institutions to provide insurance for students and supervisors alike. Many field agencies do in fact provide both liability and injury coverage for interns under their existing insurance for volunteers or employees. If so, it is essential for the intern and the school to complete any necessary paperwork officially designating the intern as a member of the class of individuals covered by the policy. The fact and extent of such coverage should also be specified in the field learning agreement.

Even if you believe you are covered by the institutions, and whether or not individual coverage is formally required by your placement site, it is good advice to obtain a policy for yourself so you can be sure you are covered personally. Fortunately, most professional associations offer discounted

policies for student members. For example, the American Psychological Association Insurance Trust (<http://www.apait.org/apait/products/studentliability/>) offers policies to student members for very reasonable rates. The National Association of Social Workers Assurance Services (http://www.naswassurance.org/student_liability.php?page_id=12) offers comparable policies for social work student members, and the American Counseling Association (<http://www.counseling.org/students/>) and the American School Counselor Association (<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=185>) actually include liability insurance as part of their student member benefits. Other professional associations offer similar benefits. More will be said about liability risks and insurance in Chapter 4, but considering the reasonableness of the rates, the potential risks, and as a start to your professional development, I strongly encourage you to join your professional association and to sign up for insurance as soon as possible if you have not already done so.

INDIVIDUAL INTERNSHIP AGREEMENTS

Beyond the more general institutional-level agreement is one specifically focused on what you will learn and do on the internship; what sorts of supervision experiences will be provided; what specific competencies will be developed and through what means; how your performance will be evaluated; and other such matters. Somewhat surprisingly, Hatcher et al. (2011) found that only 37% of the psychology practicum programs they surveyed reported the use of an individualized training plan that included specific goals, competencies, and learning sequences.

To help you develop a plan along with your instructor and supervisor, a sample individual internship agreement form is provided in Appendix C. As illustrated by that form, internship agreements should record the days and hours you will be expected to work, what your responsibilities will be, and the nature and extent of supervision to be provided. The internship agreement should also provide space to identify your goals and how you hope to achieve them during the internship.

EVALUATION

Because each internship offers different experiences and sets different expectations, and because interns differ in their personal goals, it is a good idea to be involved in the evaluation process from the beginning. To ensure the most effective and constructive learning experiences and to avoid future misunderstandings, interns, instructors, and supervisors should agree on the evaluation and grading criteria and process before the internship begins (Wayne, 2004). Everyone can then work together to ensure that the evaluation process is predictable and productive and contributes to the overall learning experience of the intern (Bogo, Regehr, Hughes, Power, & Globerman, 2002; Regehr, Regehr, Leeson, & Fusco, 2002).

As you think about the evaluation process, it is important to understand that you are not doing yourself a service if you seek, expect, or accept only positive feedback from an evaluation. I say this for several reasons. First, it is unrealistic to believe that you

will excel in everything you do from the very outset. Therefore, you should expect that in some areas your performance may be exemplary and in others it may need some improvement. That is what learning is all about. Second, if you receive only positive feedback, you will not be able to identify or improve in those areas in which you are not strong or as skilled. Kadushin and Harkness (2002) emphasized that in many instances, student evaluations of supervisors reflect a desire for more, not less, critical feedback and for more specific constructive comments rather than general impressions.

Hoffman, Hill, Homes, and Feitas (2005) made a similar observation and report that supervisee attitudes toward feedback can influence the willingness of supervisors to address challenging issues. Furthermore, Hoffman et al. (2005) found that supervisors who avoid giving difficult or critical feedback often wished later that they had offered the feedback or critical evaluation for the sake of the student, their clients, and ultimately the profession. Smith and Agate (2004) described a method of addressing overconfidence among counselor trainees as a way of encouraging interns to reflect more critically on their own inferential and assessment processes. In my own experience as a supervisor and instructor, the students who eventually go on to be most successful are not only open to constructive criticism, they actually seek it out so they can learn more about themselves and their work.

Along the same lines, students should also keep in mind that one of the most difficult but important roles faculty and supervisors fill is that of “gatekeeper” for the profession (Busseri, Tyler, & King, 2005; Gibbs & Blakely, 2000; Hatcher & Lassiter, 2007; Johnson & Campbell, 2004; Morrow, 2000; Vacha-Haase, Davenport, & Kerewsky, 2004; Wayne, 2004; Wilkerson, 2006). Not everyone who seeks to work in the helping professions is up to the task, and, like it or not, your faculty and supervisors have the difficult but essential responsibility of identifying those who do not make the grade and should not continue with their studies or training.

Given the concerns just mentioned, there is no single evaluation approach that works best. Hatcher and Lassiter (2007) described the “Practicum Competencies Outline,” which grew out of a lengthy process involving the Directors of Psychology Training Clinics and the Council of Chairs of Training Councils (<http://www.psychtrainingcouncils.org/Practicum%20Competencies%20FINAL%203-07.pdf>). The Practice Competencies Outline builds on a developmental approach to practicum training and then sets defined levels of competencies that should be achieved in various skill and knowledge areas by the end of the practicum. Also included are certain personality characteristics and skills that are deemed essential prerequisites to successful clinical performance. Hatcher and Lassiter recommended that this instrument may provide a useful basis for evaluating practicum performance. They also suggested that further research be conducted to validate this use and that the outline itself be updated as additional research informs the practice of practicum training.

Regehr et al. (2002) described comparable skill and knowledge areas for social work. These authors reviewed a variety of approaches to evaluation in field placements and emphasized the

importance of obtaining a baseline of student competence at the beginning of an internship. Such an assessment helps identify the learning needs and opportunities to be addressed during the internship and serves as a foundation for subsequent evaluation. Regehr and colleagues then recommended identifying specific learning goals that meet the needs of the student and the agency and the expectations of the school and the supervisor.

Evaluation has also received increasing attention within training of school counselors. Murphy and Kaffenberger (2007) built on the American School Counselor Association's National Model® and emphasized the importance of coordinating field learning, supervisory activities, and evaluation with the elements of the model. This coordination of training and evaluation is part of the accountability component of the National Model®. Murphy and Kaffenberger noted that accountability involves using data for three purposes—monitoring student progress, assessing counseling programs, and demonstrating counselor effectiveness.

I find this three-purpose approach to accountability particularly valuable, as it helps everyone involved keep in mind that evaluation is not simply a method for assessing the intern or trainee performance. Ideally, evaluation should give valuable information about the training and the academic programs as well. In turn, this should help specific institutions and professional disciplines as a whole demonstrate the adequacy and efficacy of their training and of the professionals who hold the relevant degrees.

If your instructor or supervisor has an established format for evaluation, review it carefully to be sure you understand it. If your instructor or supervisor does not have a fixed format, you may want to consider the sample evaluation forms provided in Appendices D and E. More will be said about the evaluation aspect of supervision in Chapter 5.

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