



INTRODUCTION TO CLINICAL TRAINING

The clinical practicum provides students the opportunity to apply and test the theories, information, and skills they have learned in the classroom with real clients, in clinical settings, under the joint supervision of licensed clinicians and IIT Clinical Psychology faculty. In their practica, students spend 16 - 20 hours per week applying their knowledge of psychopathology, assessment, personality, individual development, and cultural differences to the assessment and treatment of clients, using empirically supported assessment instruments and treatment approaches. The first practicum is typically at a community mental health treatment center serving clients from typically under-served populations and with a variety of clinical problems. Most first year sites emphasize treatment of adults, though a few offer some opportunity to see children and families. Advanced sites emphasize assessment or treatment of more specialized populations or treatment approaches, e.g., children, behavioral medicine services, anxiety disorders, refugees.

SUMMARY OF STEPS TO THE CLINICAL PRACTICUM

___ Read the Practicum Handbook thoroughly to insure that you understand the process and procedures.

___ Review sites online on the Department of Psychology's practica website.

___ Take some time to think about what you would like to learn from your practicum, particularly what populations you would like to work with and what problems you would like to address during training.

___ Submit to the practicum coordinator a list, in order of preference, which practicum sites you are interested in applying (up to five sites). This will be due one week after a practicum meeting announced in January.

___ The practicum coordinator will notify you of four sites you may apply to. Every effort will be made for you to apply to your top four sites, and that will be balanced with avoiding too much competition among IIT students (e.g., we don't want 10 IIT students applying for two positions at one site eliminating each other from consideration while no one is applying to other quality sites)

___ Create a cover letter and vita (see manual for details). Have someone else proofread your materials.

___ Request recommendation letters from faculty or supervisors.

___ Once approved, begin contacting sites and submitting applications. Most sites want at least a cover letter and vita sent to them before any interview is arranged. Some advanced sites may also request a writing sample.

___ Follow your potential practicum sites' timetables and procedures for interviewing and acceptance of practicum positions.

___ Starting fall of your second year, register for practicum credits (1 credit/semester in years 2 and 3)

TIMETABLE FOR APPLYING TO PRACTICUM SITES

Unfortunately, there is no consistent timetable followed by all practicum sites. Some sites have their own consistent, but unique, begin and end dates; some sites that follow, to a greater or lesser degree, a common schedule for accepting applications, interviewing, and selecting practicum students; some sites change from year to year as their staff and procedures change. Generally, applications are accepted in February, and interviews are scheduled during late February, March, and early April. Some sites will continue selecting applicants throughout April and May, or later. You should periodically check for new site information as sites may extend deadlines or new sites may announce openings at any time. Every effort is made to keep the files updated; however, sometimes changes may occur that have not been brought to our attention. Once accepted, practicum positions typically begin in late August or early September, although some advanced sites have positions that start as early as July. First year practica typically begin in late August and go through May while advanced practica are typically a full calendar year in length.

GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT A SITE

Start with the sites own practicum announcement and information. Talk to more senior students who have completed or are currently working at practicum at sites you are interested in. Ask faculty. Look on line. Where feasible (see below) contact personnel at the sites of interest.

CONTACTING A SITE

If a site accepts phone inquiries, you may contact the appropriate person by phone and request information and application materials (although most sites do not have a specific application form). Once you have received approval to apply to a site, the next step in contacting sites (and the first step in contacting sites that do not accept phone inquiries) is to send a cover letter and your vita. A vita is similar to a resume, but does not have to be limited to one page and may have a different ordering of elements (see examples of and information on vitae and cover letters in this manual). If a site is interested, its representative will contact you and either request more information or arrange an interview. Unless sites have made it clear that they do not want student-initiated phone contact, it is acceptable practice to contact them 1 to 2 weeks after they should have received your letter and vita in order to ask if your materials were received and whether you need to provide them with additional information. Some sites will accept only completed application packages with all their required materials (e.g., cover letter, vita, transcripts, letters of recommendation); see the following section.

PROVIDING SITES WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The file listings indicate what information the site needs to make its decision. Unfortunately, there is no standard that all sites follow. Most sites accept inquiries that include a cover letter and vita, and this is all the information they require in order to make their final decision. Some sites wish to receive more information, sometimes including letters of recommendation (one to three), transcripts, and written work samples (typically assessment reports). If you need letters of recommendation, ask for them well in advance (two weeks is suggested). Provide the letter writer with an addressed envelope and the name and title of the person to whom the letter should be addressed, the date when the letter is needed, and if the letter is to be mailed to the addressee or returned to you to include in an application packet. If the letter is to be returned to you for inclusion in a packet ask the letter writer to write his/her signature across the envelope seal. Letter writers can write better letters if you give them a copy of your vita and information about your clinical interests, your goals, and any information you would like them to mention that is specific to strengthening your application to a specific site.

ACCEPTING A PRACTICUM POSITION

Once you have accepted an offer of a practicum from a site, you are committed to fulfill that agreement. Clinical practica involve a collaboration between you, the site, and the Department of Psychology; you may not accept a position at a site and then fail to honor your commitment. That said, some sites may pressure you into accepting a position on the spot. Others follow a 'universal notification date' that is, they make offers and want an acceptance on a single date (Many local professional schools follow this date, and most local PhD programs do not.) Feel free to ask for more time to attend other interviews or consider other offers. If you are not offered more time, then you may have to accept or reject an offer. If you reject it on the spot it may not be offered again, and if you accept it on the spot then you are committed to fulfill that agreement. You will most likely know whether or not the site follows this type of procedure (most first year sites do not and some advanced sites do) and you can contact the practicum coordinator if uncertain.

LOGS

Practicum logs provide a means of tracking clinical and supervision hours and collecting clinical information that students will need later in their careers. Logs include information such as client demographic information on each client, number of sessions, number of hours, treatment modalities, assessment activities including number of particular tests administered and interpreted. Internships sites require this information; see the current APPIC internship application form for verification of the need to track the information required in the logs when applying to pre-doctoral internships (http://www.appic.org/match/5_3_match_application.html).

IF PROBLEMS ARISE AT YOUR PRACTICUM SITE

It is our desire to insure that students obtain meaningful training experiences in supportive environments. While uncommon, problems sometimes arise in even the best of circumstances, especially given the stresses and organizational demands of working in the mental health field. Learning to adapt to less-than-optimal situations while still developing your clinical skills can be a valuable learning experience in itself. However, if you are having problems at your practicum, you should first follow the procedures established by your site. This typically involves consulting with your site supervisor first. If there is a problem with your site supervisor, after first discussing it with him or her, you may decide to discuss it with whoever is next in the chain of command. If the problem cannot be resolved with your site supervisor, you should also discuss it with your IIT supervisor and s/he may help you resolve it and/or refer you to the practicum coordinator. They can assist you in working with your site to develop a plan for remediating problems.

COVER LETTERS

These letters introduce you to sites, tell them what you want from them, reemphasize information in your vita, and provide them with additional information not in your vita. A good cover letter will emphasize your interest in the site and goodness of fit between your experience and goals and the sites needs and expectations. The cover letter should demonstrate that you have thought about what your long-term goals are, that you have developed plans for working toward those goals, that you have made good use of your education and experience in developing your goals, and that the needs of and services provided by the site are a good match to your interests and goals. It's a place to highlight experience that may be buried in your CV and that might make you more attractive to that site. A cover letter should usually be one page or less:

- Address your letter of interest to the appropriate person, position (e.g., director of clinical training), or committee. Identifying the appropriate recipient may require a call to the agency. You can use "Director of Training" as a generic term; this might be desirable if you are uncertain who the current training director is.

- Describe your current academic status and institution (e.g., "I am in my second year of academic work toward a PhD degree in clinical psychology from the Illinois Institute of Technology") and what you are writing about (e.g., "I am interested in the practicum offered by your site"). Note the particular practicum you are interested in, whether diagnostic, therapy, and so forth (many sites have several different practica).
- State what training content you are seeking. It can be helpful to put this in terms of both your interests and experience (e.g., "I am particularly interested in the psychological problems of children in foster care and have worked in several social service agencies involved in foster care over the past three years") and in terms of what you would like to gain from training (e.g., "I am particularly interested in obtaining training in the assessment of learning and achievement in young children who have or who are at risk for emotional and learning problems").
- Briefly describe how you developed your interests if it seems applicable.
- State succinctly why you are interested in the practicum offered by that particular site; that is, how it matches your interests. For example, "I am interested in training at your site because of your commitment to services for children at risk of developmental delay and emotional problems." This is where you show that you have taken the time to learn something about the site and that you are not just engaged in a "shotgun" approach of applying to all possible sites.
- Review your particular strengths or skills; for example, a second language, experience with the State Mental Health Code, a talent for developing rapport with troubled children. Note that these examples should be specific skills (rather than character traits) which, if the reader questioned them, could be supported by referring to a specific position or experience listed in your vita; for example, "I am able to develop rapport with difficult children, a skill which I developed during my two years of volunteer work at the XYZ Children's Shelter" or "while working on a study of ADHD children with Dr. X."
- You might consider mentioning individuals in the field with whom you have trained or who have influenced you (e.g., "In my previous practicum I was supervised by Dr. Y, whose work with brain-damaged infants stimulated my interest in child assessment").

You may wish to ask faculty or more senior students for samples of effective cover letters.

VITA

Vita Example

Lisa L. Smith
1234 W. 12th St.
Chicago, IL 66666
(312) 321-4321

Education

(current) PhD in Clinical Psychology, Illinois Institute of Technology, in progress.
1998 BA in Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago.
Honors if relevant

Clinical Experience

1995-present Behavior technician, Smith Group Home. Develop and implement behavior management programs addressing activities of daily living, social interactions, medication adherence, etc., for older adults with chronic schizophrenia in a 12-bed group home.

[NOTE USE OF PRESENT TENSE FOR CURRENT ACTIVITIES]

1994-1995 Case manager, Uptown Community Services. Managed a caseload of 45 clients with a range of problems including homelessness, chronic mental illness, domestic violence, and poverty.

[NOTE USE OF PAST TENSE FOR PREVIOUS ACTIVITIES]

1992-1995 Volunteer, Rape Crisis Hotline. Five hours per week answering emergency calls, providing initial support and screening, and making referrals for follow-up services. Training included a 40-hour in-service in crisis management, sexual assault issues, and confidentiality law.

Research Experience

1994-1995 Research assistant, Illinois Institute of Technology. "The effects of motor vehicle accidents on neuropsychological development in preschool-age children," with Dr. Frank L. Smith. Interviewed all 60 participants, administered and scored six neuropsychological tests used in battery, and coded and entered all data.

Relevant Coursework

Assessment: Psychopathology, Intellectual Assessment, Personality Assessment

Psychotherapy: Group Psychotherapy, Insight-Oriented Psychotherapy, Behavior Therapy

Other: Clinical Skills, Intermediate and Advanced Statistics, Research Design and Methods

Workshops and Presentations

1/2/98 "Assessing abuse histories in medical patients." Dr. Sharon Smith. Presentation at the Northwestern Domestic Violence Center.

3/5/97 "Depression in a geriatric population." Dr. Sam Smithy. Workshop at Roosevelt University.

Special Skills

Fluent in Spanish and Polish; experienced in Microsoft Word, Excel, and Access for clinical and research work; familiar with Illinois State's mental health codes and foster care guidelines.

Professional Affiliations

American Psychological Association, student member.

Psy Chi, division leader.