

Frequently Asked Questions about Field Placements/Traineeships

The Department of Counseling requires students to complete two academic years of work in the field under supervision of an experienced professional counselor while concurrently taking practicum classes where counseling skills are taught. Each year of work in the field must be completed at a different field site. Hence, students are exposed to two different settings and two different supervisors during the course of training. Supervised work in the field offers the opportunity for students to integrate the material learned in the classroom with experience in the field.

1. What is a field placement/traineeship/internship?

A field placement is the time spent working in the field at a social service agency, school, college or career center under supervision of a trained counseling professional.

The terminology, 'field placement' and 'traineeship' are interchangeable. However, 'internship' refers to a post master's field placement required for Marriage Family Therapy students who are working toward licensure. After graduating from the program MFT students must register with the Board of Behavioral Sciences to become registered interns and may then continue to accumulate supervised clinical hours needed for licensure.

2. How much time am I expected to spend at a field placement?

The minimum amount of time required by the department of counseling for a first year placement is 12 hours per week and for a second year placement 16 hours per week. However, many field sites require more than the minimum number of hours. Some sites require that students work the calendar year (11 or 12 months) rather than the academic year. The number of hours/ months must be negotiated by the student and the field site and students need to work around their academic schedule. During the semester break, December/January, students are usually expected to continue to work with clients in the field. This is also negotiated by student and field site.

A total of 600 hours of which 240 hours are direct client contact hours, must be completed for each specialization over the course of the program. It is possible that some of the hours worked can count for two specializations. Frequently, however, students with more than one specialization will spend more than the required four semesters in the field.

The field placement is an essential part of learning to become a counselor. It is an investment of time and energy that provides the opportunity to use in practice what is being taught in the classroom. One cannot underestimate the value of this experience, nor the considerable commitment of time, energy and resources.

3. Is it possible to count hours for field work prior to entering the program or prior to taking the practicum courses (Counseling 706)?

No. Field work and practicum classes must be taken concurrently. Work in the field that occurs before entering the program and before taking a practicum class does not count toward field placement requirements of the program.

After taking the first sequence of practicum classes (counseling 706/736 along with the field placement 705/736) students may take counseling 850, with consent of instructor, during the summer or during semesters when they will be taking only coursework. This allows the accumulation of field hours for those students who have two specializations and must, therefore, accrue hours in both. It also allows students who wish to accrue additional hours toward licensure to do so.

However, the required 12 hours per week for 1st year in the field and 16 hours per week for 2nd year in the field must be completed concurrently with practicum courses regardless of accumulation of additional hours.

Counseling 850 may be taken after completing two years of field placement to further accrue hours.

4. When must I start my Fieldwork?

You must start fieldwork when you enter the program if you wish to graduate within two years. You may take courses first, but may not accumulate more than 24 units of coursework before you begin fieldwork/practicum coursework (Counseling 705/706).

5. Who can be a field supervisor ?

Supervisors must be counselors who have earned a master's degree in counseling or a closely related field (social work, clinical psychology) and who have at least 2 years experience in the field.

Marriage Family Therapy students must be supervised by a clinician who has been licensed by the State of California for at least 2 years. The clinician may be a licensed Marriage Family Therapist (MFT), a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), a licensed Clinical Psychologist or a board certified psychiatrist.

School counseling students working toward the Pupil Personnel Services Credential must be supervised by a counselor who has this credential (PPSC).

Rehabilitation counseling students should be supervised by a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC). However, if this is not possible the counseling program will provide the CRC supervision.

6. What is supervision?

The department of counseling requires that every student receive a minimum of 1 hour per week of individual supervision. We highly recommend group supervision in addition to individual supervision. This formal supervision time is the opportunity students have to receive information and direction from the supervisor regarding both the content and the process of the work. Styles of supervision vary, but students should expect consistency and an explanation of what will be required and expected in supervision.

Informal supervision is also a valuable part of the experience. Supervisors are role models who help students develop a professional identity and who are available to help with crises, unexpected events and difficulties and who are a source of support during a new learning experience.

7. How do I find a field placement?

Field placements must be approved by the department of counseling and must meet all of our requirements. After you are accepted into the program and at the orientation you will meet with the coordinator of your specialization who will provide information about available placement sites. Field Placement Coordinators will be available to help you determine which sites are appropriate for you and will guide you to the contact person at the site. Students will need to contact the sites, have a resume ready and aim to proceed to the interview phase. Identify yourself as a student in the Counseling Program at San Francisco State University and proceed as if this were an application for a job. Consultation with fieldwork coordinators is available through this process, with regard to resumes, possible interview questions and additional referrals if the first ones are not successful. In addition, resource materials are available in the department with information about approved field placement sites. Listings are also posted on this web site under the heading 'field placements'. Students must read the handbook and be aware of department requirements before going out for interviews. For Marriage Family Therapy students there is a faire on orientation day where students have the opportunity to meet with agency representatives and start the process on that day. Another faire is held in February to help with the search for a second year placement. Some of the placements at these faires are appropriate for Rehabilitation Counseling, School and Gerontology Students.

8. Can I develop my own field placement?

It is not recommended that students develop placements that have not been approved and used by the department. However, occasionally students know of a particular agency in which they are interested and which seems to meet department requirements. In this case the agency must complete an application to be a field site and the fieldwork coordinator will review the documentation, talk or meet with the supervisor and determine if the placement can be used.

9. Can I use my work as a field placement?

The department does not recommend using work as a field placement. However, one year of placement may be completed at a place of work if the nature of the work and supervision meets department requirements, if the supervisor is not the student's boss, and if there is some client load specifically allocated for training purposes. This needs to be approved by the fieldwork coordinator.

10. Will I receive any remuneration for my field placement?

Most field placements are unpaid. Some placements offer stipends usually around \$1,000 per year. Some agencies offer stipends for underrepresented minority students also between \$1,000 - \$1,500 per year. Marriage Family Therapy students must be aware that they may not receive payment as an independent contractor.

11. What should I look for in a placement?

Students should look for a placement that meets all department requirements and that is a good fit. A placement may be ideal for student A and may be a poor fit for student B. We recommend that students look for a supervisor with whom they feel that they can work well and who will provide the time and space for them to learn and grow. This is generally more important in the development of a beginning counselor than the specific client population.

It is also important to know that there is space available for private, confidential meetings with clients, that there will be opportunities to make tape recordings of interview sessions and that a sufficient case load will be available offering the opportunity for individual counseling sessions. Short, one time sessions for the purpose of triage and referral are not sufficient. Students must be able to build a counseling relationship with a number of clients.

Placements that offer organized training programs, staff meetings and case conferences often require more time, and also provide a rich learning environment.

12. What questions might be asked at an interview?

- Have you had any experience in counseling or a counseling related field?
- What are your interests?
- How do you deal with stress?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses as they might relate to counseling?
- Why are you interested in this agency/school/college?
- How did you come to the field of counseling?
- Have you ever received counseling?
- How would you feel about requesting psychotherapy?
- Tell me about your work experience.
- This is a case that you might have in this setting: (description of case) How would you deal with this?

13. What questions might I ask at an interview?

- What would a day be like for me as a trainee in this agency/school/center?
- What is typically involved in supervision?
- Will I receive an hour of individual supervision each week?
- How many clients will I have?
- How many longer term clients/ short term clients?
- Can I audiotape interviews with clients?
- Is there office space for me and for confidential interviews with clients?
- Will I be able to attend any trainings?

14. What are the basic requirements of a field placement?

For more detailed description please review the practicum and trainee handbook and consult the field placement guidelines on the “forms” page of this website.

- Minimum of 12 hours per week at the site for the 1st year, 16 for 2nd year
- Minimum of 2 and maximum of 5 clients per 12 hours and based on hour long interview sessions.
- Minimum of 1 hour of supervision per week
- Supervisor has a master’s degree and 2 years experience in the field
- Allowed to tape record sessions with clients (with client permission)
- Space for confidential interview sessions available.
- Site must have an application on file with the Department of Counseling and must be an approved site.

15. Is it possible to accumulate hours toward licensure as a Marriage Family Therapist while in the program?

Yes. Students can accumulate up to 1300 hours toward licensure. Three hundred of these hours are designated as training (i.e. workshops, conferences etc.), another 300 are 100 hours of personal psychotherapy (ratio of 1 hour of psychotherapy with a licensed professional to 3 hours toward accumulation of hours for licensure) and 750 hours are designated as direct client counseling contact and supervision. Since the Board of Behavioral Sciences has specific regulations that are different from those of the department of counseling, only some of the hours spent in field placements will count for licensure.