Practicum Opportunity

Supervisor: Lee Burdette Williams, Ph.D.
Office: Mansfield Hall, Burlington VT
Practicum Supervisor Title: Director of Student Life and Collegiate Partnerships
Phone: (802) 870-0981
Email: lee@mansfieldhall.org

Site description: Mansfield Hall is a private academic and residential support program for students enrolled at UVM, Champlain College and the Community College of Vermont located on the edge of UVM’s main campus. Enrolling between 25 and 35 students, Mansfield Hall provides services for students who need more support, both academically and socially, than many colleges offer. Most Mansfield Hall students have nonverbal learning disabilities, executive function challenges, or are high-functioning autistic (i.e., Asperger’s). Some need intensive tutoring, some need life skills and social coaching, and some need both.

A practicum student at Mansfield Hall will gain insight into a growing concern in higher education: how to serve and support these students with limited institutional resources. It is not simply a matter of directing these students to the institution’s disability services office to receive accommodations. The students who come to Mansfield Hall would likely not succeed in most college settings even with accommodations. They will drop out, fail academically, or be removed for conduct-related reasons. Mansfield Hall’s goal is to help these students transition successfully into the college environment and ultimately into an independent, self-supporting life. Working with institutions to help build their capacity to serve these students while at the same time supporting these students to better navigate college is the dual role Mansfield Hall plays, and a practicum student will see both sides of this equation.

During the course of the semester, a practicum student will:

- Learn about disabilities and differences common among college students;
- Learn about current practices for supporting these students;
- Understand the daily operations of a college support program (admissions, staffing, assessment);
- Spend 7-8 hours per week in the milieu (Mansfield Hall’s public spaces, study space, café), interacting and working alongside students and staff;
Work throughout the semester on a special project (1-2 hours per week). Examples of possible projects include:
  o Researching and presenting to staff on outstanding college support programs;
  o Developing staff, student or parent handbooks;
  o Developing inservice training for UVM or Champlain College resident advisors, orientation leaders, peer mentors, professional staff or faculty to help build institutional capacity;
  o Developing and delivering inservice workshop(s) for Mansfield Hall staff;
  o Helping Mansfield Hall staff and students develop a service project, and assisting in the implementation of that project.

**Learning outcomes:**

Practicum student will:

- Consider student development theory in relation to disabilities issues;
- Become conversant in challenges higher education faces with regard to this population;
- Improve one-on-one interaction skills with students;
- Develop or improve capacity in important professional skills such as:
  - project management
  - presentations
  - assessment