

University of Vermont
College of Education and Social Service
Department of Integrated Professional Studies
Human Development and Family Studies Program

HDFS 296

Planning your Field Experience

November 2009

What is an internship?

An internship is a work experience in which you study what you are working at. It involves

- supervision by a responsible person in the setting where you are working,
- reading, • writing reflectively and analytically about the experience,
- exploring the connections of the experience to courses in your major,
- meeting and discussing the experience regularly with a faculty supervisor.

How do I get started?

Think about what kind of experience you would like to have. Is there a particular age group or setting you'd like to explore? Are there directions you have thought about for graduate school or future employment? You could use your internship to find out more about them. Meet with an HDFS faculty member to discuss your interests. You will develop a list of possibilities, which you can then investigate.

Create an up-to-date resume you can give to your HDFS faculty supervisor and to potential agency personnel with whom you will meet.

Where can I do my internship?

You can do an internship almost anywhere that will afford you opportunity to work with people in a responsible position, where you will have adequate supervision, and where you can schedule sufficient hours to meet the requirements. It is best to resist doing an internship in a site that might be comfortable for you, and familiar, but in which you will not stretch yourself or learn new skills.

How do I go about finding a site?

Once you have a type of site in mind, search for examples in the Burlington area. A list of possible sites appears below. Beyond that, there are announcements on the bulletin board in The HDFS office, listings in the telephone book, the experiences of other students, etc., etc. Explore the web sites of interesting agencies. Then call and make an appointment with the person responsible for interns in the setting. Meet with that person and discuss what you are looking for and what experience they can offer. What would you do in the setting? What would you learn? Who would supervise you? Do not make a commitment until you have discussed the options with your faculty supervisor.

Where have HDFS students done internships in the past?

A wide variety of settings have accommodated our students. A list of recent and potential placements is available.

Can I get paid for my internship?

Yes. While some programs do not permit credit for paid employment, we do not have such a restriction. The credit and grade are based on your analysis of the experience, the way you connect it to your HDFS courses and concepts, not for the work itself.

Do I have to do my internship all in one semester?

No. Internships vary. Some work best if you are involved as many hours as possible for a relatively brief time. Others work better if you are engaged over a longer period of time, so you can see how activities change over time. In some cases, the agency will expect or require a longer commitment. Some students also choose to continue internships beyond the required minimum 6 credits. You may register for additional credits as electives.

How many hours do I have to work for each credit?

You will put in about 40 hours for each credit. That includes actual time in the setting as well as the time you spend reading, writing in your journal, and meeting with your faculty supervisor.

Can I do my internship in the summer?

Yes, if there is an HDFS faculty member available and willing to supervise you. You have to enroll in the course for the summer, so tuition must be considered.

Do all HDFS faculty have the same requirements for field experience?

All of us have similar expectations, but there are some differences in the details of our supervision.

Who supervises my internship?

Any faculty member in the HDFS program can supervise your internship. It works best if the faculty supervisor has some experience and understanding pertinent to the specific setting you are working in.

You will also have an agency supervisor, someone who works in the setting where you are interning. The agency supervisor is the person responsible for teaching you to do the work, and to whom you go if you have questions about it.

When should I start planning my internship?

Begin the semester before you intend to enroll. Meet with your potential faculty supervisor to discuss your interests. Set up interviews, and try to have your internship placement determined before you depart at the end of the semester. That way you will be ready to begin the first week of classes, and not lose time or suffer panic by trying to set it up at the beginning of the semester. Some sites may allow you to begin before classes start.

Start a journal when you begin the planning process. Record and reflect on your thoughts about the internship, the people you contact, and the interviews you participate in.

What do I tell the agency person when I interview, what do I ask?

Read and be sure you understand the guidelines before you talk to people at agencies. Tell them about the major and the internship. Ask what they might have you do, and what you

would learn by working there. Find out about what training they would provide, and what supervision would be like. Ask about schedules, flexibility, and anything else that would help you understand what you would be doing.

Do not make a commitment to the agency at the interview. Explain that you have to discuss your plans with your faculty supervisor before you can make a commitment. Be sure to get the contact person's full name and telephone number, and any information the agency might have available.

Sometimes it becomes clear that the agency cannot use you, or that you are not qualified to do what they need. Use the interview to broaden your network of possibilities: ask for their ideas about other opportunities that might be available. Where else do they think you might find good experience?

Who do I meet with and how often?

You meet with your faculty advisor as often as the two of you determine will be useful. Typically, this is every two weeks or so, for 45 minutes to an hour. Some faculty require group meetings.

What do we talk about in our meetings?

We will talk about the experience, what you think about the experience, what you have written, what you are reading, the connections you are making, how the experience is influencing your understanding, and anything else that is pertinent. We will discuss what you have written in your journal, which should be submitted two or three days prior to each meeting.

What do I write in my journal?

Your journal is a place to describe, analyze, and reflect upon your experience. It also becomes a dialogue with your faculty supervisor, who writes responses to your entries, which you respond to in turn. You will write about the experience, the setting, the people in the setting, your reactions to the experience, how the experience reflects what you have read about and studied in other courses, the reading you do about the setting and the work you are doing, and so on.

How often should I write in my journal?

You should write regularly in your journal, but there is no set schedule. Some students prefer to write every day, others twice a week. You should, of course, be thinking about your experience every day, so it would be reasonable to try to capture your reflections every day. Certainly you should write any time a significant event or transaction occurs in your internship. You should date each entry you make in your journal.

What are you looking for in my journal?

The most basic level of journaling is description of what happened. Then comes reflection on the experience: how did you experience it, what were your thoughts and feelings, what were other people thinking and feeling, what else might have happened, how else could you or other people have acted, what might have resulted if you had acted differently? Then comes analysis of the experience: how do you understand the episode described? Interpretation of the experience uses relevant conceptual frameworks to reframe and explain the events or episode. Why did they happen as they did? After considering the episode or experience in each of these ways, you can extend and elaborate on it. What lesson was learned, what knowledge did you

construct from the reflection and interpretation? How will that understanding be useful in the future? What questions remain or were generated, and how will you go about studying them?

The highest or most sophisticated level of journaling incorporates these more basic levels and questions and connects them to ideas and principles you have studied in courses in your major. You should be thinking developmentally and ecologically about the experience. Provide developmental and ecological assessments of the people you encounter in your experience. What stage of life are they in? How are they managing the tasks and expectations of the stage? How does their experience help or hinder their development? How does the setting fit into their ecosystems? You should reflect analytically on the activities of the agency or setting you are in. What are the goals of the program and its activities? What transactions occur? With whom? How does the program fit in the ecosystem of the community?

When you begin your internship, you should review the reading you have done in previous courses that might be relevant. What does the text from HDFS 5, Human Development, tell you about people at the stage of life the people you are encountering in the internship site are in? What have you read about the issues the program addresses? Past reading and experiences should be reflected in your journal.

How much should I write?

How much you write depends on how much you have to relate, and how much reflection and analysis you can do. Two or three pages a day is reasonable, but that depends on whether you are typing it on a computer or free-handing in a notebook. The point is that your grade depends in part on the depth and extent of your reflection and analysis, so the more the better, as long as it is thoughtful.

Are spelling and grammar important in my journal?

Faculty expectations for journals vary. Some expect all writing submitted to be polished, revised, and correct. Others place more emphasis on getting your ideas and feelings into the journal, without self-editing that inhibits freedom of expression. A good practice is to use the basic journal as a place to write freely, without self-censorship or worrying about organization, to capture the experience. Then, if expected by the faculty supervisor, you can use the basic journal as the basis for more polished and organized work to meet specific assignments. Regardless of the faculty expectations, a journal should be a document to which you return to add later reflections and elaborations.

Will I have to write anything else?

Each faculty supervisor will have specific requirements, but in general, you are likely to have to write several additional products. These may include a statement of learning goals, critical reflections on specific readings, a comparison of the field site to others of its kind, an analysis of the relationship of specific prior course concepts to the internship experience, a plan for improving the effectiveness of the agency, a reflective summary of the semester experience, etc. The syllabus for the specific semester will specify the assignments due.

How is my internship graded?

The grade for HDFS 296 is based on the intellectual work you do as part of the experience. That is, it is based on the depth and breadth of the thinking you do, in your journal, your other writing, and in our meetings. You are expected to analyze, not just describe. You should be thinking, writing, and talking about how the experience reflects the material in your previous and current courses. You are also evaluated on the basis of how responsible you are in making and keeping appointments with your faculty supervisor, submitting your journal in advance of your

meetings, and responding to questions, comments, and suggestions made by the supervisor in your meetings and in your journal.

The grade is not related to how well you do the work expected of you in the setting, how highly your agency supervisor regards you, how punctual you are, etc. The grade and the credit are for the academic part of the internship.

Note:

Some schools and agencies will require background checks, references, and/or fingerprints. Provide all the information they ask for as quickly as possible. If you need to have fingerprints taken and a criminal record check done, contact UVM Police Services.

Semester _____ Date Initiated _____ Credits _____

Permission _____ Enrolled _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phones _____

Agency _____

Address _____

Supervisor _____

Phone _____

____ Expected outcomes discussed.

____ Enrollment completed.

____ Readings recommended by Agency supervisor.

____ Readings recommended by Faculty supervisor.

____ Meeting with faculty supervisor and agency supervisor scheduled.

____ Meetings with faculty supervisor scheduled.

____ Dates for submission of journal established.

____ Mid-semester check-in completed.

____ Final summary and evaluation submitted.

____ Course and supervision evaluation submitted.

____ Grade submitted.