

# The Internship, Practicum, and Field Placement Handbook

A GUIDE FOR THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

Brian N. Baird and Debra Mollen

EIGHTH EDITION



Baird Introductory Materials: *You must carefully read this entire document as the first step of your journey toward a successful internship or field placement.*

The Internship, Practicum, and Field Placement Handbook is a practical guide for interns in the helping professions, with real-world knowledge of the skills students need through every phase of their practicum, field placement, or internship. This text expertly guides students through the essential skills needed for beginning work in the field of mental health and outlines skills that will serve students throughout their academic and professional careers. Skills discussed include how to make a great first impression, understanding the process and content of clinical writing, recordkeeping, working with peers and supervisors, understanding diversity, cultivating self-care, and promoting safety. Every phase of the internship is discussed chronologically: from finding and preparing for placements to concluding relationships with clients and supervisors. Following an evidence and competency-based approach, the latest research findings are reviewed from the fields of psychology, social work, and counseling. The Internship, Practicum, and Field Placement Handbook is an invaluable resource for students, faculty, and supervisors engaged in the exciting, challenging experience of transitioning from academia into clinical training in the field. Free online resources available at [www.routledge.com/9781138478701](http://www.routledge.com/9781138478701) support the text. Brian N. Baird is former Chair of Psychology at Pacific Lutheran University, USA. He practiced

clinically for more than 20 years, served 12 years in the U.S. Congress, and has supervised hundreds of interns. Debra Mollen is Professor and Licensed Psychologist at Texas Woman's University, USA, Co-Chair for the revised APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Girls and Women, and an AASECT-Certified Sexuality Educator.

#### Preface:

Professionals and students in the helping professions consider internships, practicums, and field placements among the most influential experiences of their careers. At the same time, however, students also report that their normal coursework typically provides only indirect and, in many cases, insufficient preparation for their first real-world exposure. We have designed this book to bridge the gap between academic coursework and the knowledge, skills, and emotional challenges and rewards beyond the classroom. As strong proponents of evidence-based practice and competency-based education, throughout this book we have drawn on the best and most current information available from psychology, counseling, social work, school counseling, psychiatry, and other helping professions. Based on this research and having worked with hundreds of students and trainees in beginning and advanced placements, our goal with every edition has been to write a book that will be valuable to all our readers who represent many academic disciplines and levels of training. Students in their first or second field experience will likely get the greatest benefit from this text, but even advanced graduate students and their instructors consistently say they find the book covers key areas and material that might otherwise not be addressed in their training. This eighth edition is particularly exciting because it brings the skills and insights of Dr. Debra Mollen as co-author. Dr. Mollen is a skilled clinician, gifted instructor and supervisor, and a scholar of diversity and gender issues. With Dr. Mollen's input, every chapter has been updated to reflect a thorough and comprehensive review of the latest research and clinical literature across all of the major helping professions. Of special note are Dr. Mollen's many insightful additions to and revisions of diversity issues addressed in Chapter 6 and throughout the text. This edition also addresses the most recent ethical codes of the leading professions along with the latest legal and regulatory developments at federal and state levels. We have continued to consult with numerous faculty and supervisors in each discipline and in various types of academic institutions and internship settings. Equally important, we regularly seek and receive feedback from interns themselves about how to make the text the most meaningful and helpful to the most important people of all—those who are actually using it. Based on feedback from students and faculty who use the text, we have implemented several changes in this latest edition. Overall, the text is more streamlined to make chapters easier and quicker for students to read while still addressing the most important information. For prior users, the most notable outcome of this is that we have moved information about how to find and establish internship placements out of Chapter 1 and placed it in the Appendix at the end of the book. That shortens Chapter 1 and allows us to focus on issues that affect all interns starting out, whether a placement was pre-assigned or established by interns themselves. Throughout the text, we have removed and replaced old references with more current sources. This is not to say that all older references have been supplanted. In a number of cases, we retained original source material as we believe it is important to honor those whose work is considered a landmark in the helping professions. We recognize the changing face of our field and have responded in kind by expanding our discussion of the role of social media as a clinical, ethical, and personal safety issue for interns. We have included detailed discussion about online service delivery and

supervision as well as the importance of providing treatment to veterans and disaster victims. We added unique challenges and strengths of non-native English speakers and writers in Chapter 7, while the stress and self-care topics covered in Chapter 8 have now, sadly, included coping with mass shootings and other acts of violence. ■ Making the Most of this Book

### Overview of the Contents

A glance at the table of contents reveals that this text is organized along both chronologic and thematic lines. The chapters have been organized sequentially to anticipate the stages interns pass through and the understanding and skills that will be required in those stages. Initial chapters deal with getting necessary paperwork and formal matters ironed out, meeting staff and clients, learning from peer groups and classes, and key ethical and legal issues. Middle chapters deal with supervision, working with individuals of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, clinical writing, self-care, and personal safety. Discussions of termination, finishing the internship, and lessons learned conclude the book. Finally, the appendices (A–K), which had been included as removable, perforated pages in prior editions, are now all available online in editable formats to allow supervisors, instructors, and interns to customize them to better meet your needs (see eResources). These files include examples of forms useful for establishing learning plans, supervision agreements, ethical guidelines, evaluations, and other procedures. Although the book is organized chronologically, an important difference between this text and others is that the material in this book is heavily frontloaded. Compared to courses in which you may read a chapter each week or so during a quarter or semester, with this book you may want to read much or all of the content during the first few weeks of your placement, then refer to specific chapters again as you proceed through the internship. For example, many students find it helpful to review the chapters dealing with clinical writing and case notes at the very start of their internships. It is also a good idea to give some consideration to the chapters on personal safety issues and self-care at the outset of your experience rather than waiting until after some issue arises. Of course, some chapters, such as the one on termination and ending the internship can wait till later, but even these topics are good to consider at the beginning because understanding how to close cases and conclude a placement successfully can help you better prepare for these events ahead of time.

### Resources and References

A second difference between this book and other texts is our emphasis on practical skills and knowledge. In writing this book, we have tried to present information that will be immediately relevant to your internship and will be of practical use to you in the field. We recognize, however, that entire books have been written about the topics of each of the chapters. If you are interested in more detail about a topic, we have provided references throughout the text and we hope you will refer to these as you read and while you train at your internship. The practice of going beyond a textbook to pursue additional resources is an essential part of how professionals pursue topics of interest. Throughout your internship and your future study and training, make it a practice to not simply accept a single source of information but to seek different sources and learn from different perspectives both within your own discipline and across professions. Doing the Exercises

### Part of the reason we enjoy working with interns is that we believe strongly in the value of experiential and discovery-based learning. Because internship training and clinical work involve a constant process of self-exploration and change, the textual material of each chapter is accompanied by self-exploration and experiential learning exercises. The more one works in this field, the more acutely one realizes the importance of self-examination and understanding. We encourage you to use these exercises and be open to the experiences. It can be extremely valuable to discuss your responses with your peers, trusted faculty members, and supervisors. If your goal is simply to get through the book or if you are pressed for time, you may be tempted to skim over an exercise or

suggested activity. We hope you will resist that temptation and devote some time to the exercises. A given exercise may seem unnecessary to you, but you will not really know unless you test your knowledge. It is one thing to tell yourself that you already know something, but it is another matter to really explore and reflect on an issue in a structured, systematic way. In our experience as instructors and supervisors, and as practicing clinicians, we have continually been surprised by how often we think we know something but then discover a completely new insight or understanding. Keep this Book Some students indiscriminately sell their textbooks the minute a class is over. In this case, that would be a mistake. If you plan to go on to work or further study in the field, this book as well as your other basic textbooks should begin to make up the core of your professional library; you should have them handy as references for future classes and as you work in the field. The truth is, we have done A LOT of research for you and if you want or need to dive more deeply into a topic, the sources cited in this text are great resources to get you started. In every major topic area of this text we have screened hundreds of journal articles, books, and other resources, selecting what we believe are the most significant, up to date, and informative sources to guide the content and include as references for your further study. The marginal return you might gain from a resale is far outweighed by the value of having your own resources to draw on and refer back to in the future. Developing a personal library is part of the process of becoming a professional, and you might as well begin that process with this book. If you do go on to work in the field or to future internships, you will have many occasions to refer back to the chapters on ethics, writing, supervision, diversity, stress, and other topics. Keep this book when the course is over and read it again in the future.

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# 1 Preparation

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

A young Peace Corps worker teaching overseas 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. The leadoff batter, a wiry young boy of 13, stepped up to the makeshift home plate with a broad smile. Their teacher, now coach, surveyed the field, took an exaggerated windup and 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, the teacher found that all of his players in the field 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, the teacher was the only player left on the field. The whole team, even the batter, had raced from the field to home, thrilled with how many runs they believed they had just scored. "Somewhere," the teacher 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 the young players and perhaps with their new coach, who, as it happens, was a good friend of one of this book's authors, Dr. Baird. Most interns report feeling a mixture of enthusiasm, nervousness, determination, and uncertainty and regardless of all the coursework and study, there is no substitute for real experience. Only by taking the risk 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 first-hand what you have been learning in your readings and classes. You will quickly discover that reading 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, while helpful, often differs significantly from participating in actual therapy sessions.

You will also discover that many things you need to know when you begin to practice, such as ethical and legal issues, writing case notes, engaging in supervision, and a host of other topics, may be different in practice than when, or if, you studied them in class. Even when subjects have been studied in class, as the teacher-turned-coach learned

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## ■ Meeting with Your Instructor

Your first task 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, Grus, & Wise, 2011). Either way, initial contact with an instructor is vital for several reasons.

The most important reason is to ensure 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 contacting 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; Polychronis & Brown, 2016; Zakutansky & Sirles, 1993). Considering this shared liability, the faculty in your department must be involved in all aspects of your internship, from the very beginning until the conclusion.

We think it's important for students to be aware that it typically takes instructors and supervisors a great deal of effort to establish a relationship with internship sites (Cornish, Smith-Acuña, & Nadkarni, 2005). Many programs have a fixed set of placement sites and long-established relationships with their students' supervisors. 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.

## ■ Finding and Selecting a Placement

Academic institutions vary in how they select and assign students to internships. In many programs the school has prearranged sites and then either directly assigns students to specific sites or allows students to choose from among different established placements. If that is the approach of your school, much of the preliminary work has already been done for you and you can simply proceed with the rest of this chapter, beginning with learning about institutional arrangements below.

On the other hand, some institutions either require or allow students to locate their own placements and make arrangements for their internship. If you need, or are allowed, to establish a placement on your own, or if you are given substantial choice in selecting a site from multiple options, we encourage you to first consult the advice we offer in the Appendix, then proceed to the rest of this chapter. In the Appendix, we discuss in detail how to decide what kind of placement to pursue, how to locate and arrange to work with a specific placement site, and other fundamentals about selecting or setting up a placement for your internship. We also offer a selection checklist in Appendix A (see eResources), designed to help students and supervisors assess what sort of internship placement and experiences will be most beneficial for each intern. We place that information separately from this chapter because for interns who need to select or choose their placement, it is very important, but for those who are directly assigned a placement by their program, there is no need to complete the checklist in Appendix A (see eResources) or review much of the material in the Appendix at the end of the book.

For all students, whether you are assigned a placement or must choose or arrange one, we strongly recommend you read the rest of this chapter, beginning with understanding the nature of the relationship between your academic institution and your internship site.

### Institutional Agreements

Whether you must find your own placement or are assigned to one, before a student begins an internship we strongly encourage a formal signed agreement be established between the sponsoring academic institution and the host internship site. As society in general and health care have become increasingly litigious, the need for written internship agreements has grown. Wayne (2004) emphasized that for certain legal purposes, particularly for

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## [Liability Insurance](#)

Liability insurance provides financial protection and legal support in the event that an individual professional or clinical setting are sued for damages alleged to have been caused by malpractice or negligence. You may not have considered the importance of such insurance to interns, but consider the research of Gelman, Pollack, and Auerbach (1996), who found that 2.3% of programs surveyed reported that one of their students, and in five out of six cases the supervising faculty member as well, had been named in liability cases. Considering this finding, it is certainly advisable for more institutions to provide insurance for both students and supervisors. 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 your academic institutions or clinical placement, and whether or not individual coverage is formally required by your placement site, it is wise 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 ([www.apait.org/apait/products/studentliability](http://www.apait.org/apait/products/studentliability)) offers policies to student members for very reasonable rates. The National Association of Social Workers Assurance Services ([www.naswassurance.org/malpractice/student-liability-individuals](http://www.naswassurance.org/malpractice/student-liability-individuals)) offers comparable policies for social work student members, and the American Counseling Association ([www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/membership/student-broch-18.pdf?sfvrsn=1d9c4e2c\\_2](http://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/membership/student-broch-18.pdf?sfvrsn=1d9c4e2c_2)) and the American School Counselor Association ([www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/member-benefits-info/liability-insurance](http://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/member-benefits-info/liability-insurance)) actually include liability insurance as part of their student member benefits. Other professional associations offer similar benefits. We will have more to say about liability risks and insurance in [Chapter 4](#), but considering the reasonableness of the rates, the potential risks, and getting off to a good start in your professional development, we strongly encourage you to join your professional association and sign up for insurance as soon as possible if you have not already done so. In addition to the matter of insurance, we believe joining your professional association is, for many other reasons, a fundamental element of your development and practice as a professional.

## [Individual Internship Agreements](#)

Beyond the more general institutional-level agreement, you should also work with both your instructor and supervisor to establish a plan specifically focused on what you will learn and do on the internship; expectations for supervision; what specific competencies will be developed and through what means, and how your performance will be evaluated. 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.

We believe every intern should have such a plan and to help you develop one with your instructor and supervisor, we have provided a sample individual internship agreement form in Appendix C (see eResources). As you'll see, internship agreements should record the days and hours you will be expected to work, what your responsibilities will be, and the nature of the supervision to be provided. The internship agreement should also provide space to identify your goals and plans 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 advisable to be involved in planning 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).

Fundamental to evaluation in the helping professions are the principles of competency-based education and assessment. Competency assessment does not focus solely on knowledge-based acquisition but instead emphasizes demonstrated performance in certain key areas of essential professional skills, personal conduct, character, and applied knowledge.

In 2015, the Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology (APA/COA, 2015) were approved by the American Psychological Association and came into effect in 2017. These standards guide graduate health service psychology training programs, including internships and, among other things, specify that students must demonstrate competence in the following areas:

- i. Research
- ii. Ethical and legal standards
- iii. Individual and cultural diversity
- iv. Professional values, attitudes, and behaviors
- v. Communication and interpersonal skills
- vi. Assessment
- vii. Intervention
- viii. Supervision
- ix. Consultation and interprofessional/interdisciplinary skills.

(p. 12)

Whether or not you are in graduate school, knowing the general areas of competence considered important for your discipline and profession can give you a sense of key areas in which you may wish to develop your own competencies. Also, as you will discover, many of the topics identified in this list are also addressed directly or indirectly throughout this text.

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Given the focus on competency education, how do programs evaluate competencies among students and trainees? Grus, Falender, Fouad, and Lavelle (2016) reviewed two leading competency-based tools and conducted surveys asking training programs what competencies were viewed as important as well as what competencies were most often not achieved and how remediation for deficits were addressed. Included among the 19 competency areas they identified were components of professionalism such as integrity, deportment, accountability, concern for the welfare of others, and professional identity. Issues relating to diversity awareness, ethical knowledge and practice, self-care, and affective skills also ranked highly.

As you think about the evaluation process, we encourage you to understand that you are not doing yourself a service if you seek, expect, value, or accept only positive feedback from an evaluation. We say this for several reasons. First, it is unrealistic to believe that you will excel in everything you do from the very outset. Rather, 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. 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, Holmes, and Freitas (2005) made a similar observation and reported 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. In our experience as supervisors and instructors, the students who eventually go on to be most successful are not only open to constructive criticism, they actually seek it out in a sincere and admirable quest to 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 eligible or suitable, and your faculty and supervisors have the difficult yet essential responsibility of identifying those whose potential for improvement is irremediable and should not continue with their studies or training.

The importance of rigorous assessment for professional competency was well demonstrated by Fur and Brown-Rice (2018), who found in a survey that 77% of graduate psychology and counseling students reported they had worked with at least one peer who demonstrated significant problems of professional competency. The identified areas of concern included emotional regulation, unprofessional conduct, inadequate clinical skills, unethical behavior, and other psychological concerns. Students who observed peers with these problems reported feeling frustrated, resentful, stressed by their peers' actions, that their own learning was disrupted, and had concerns about the impact on the profession and on clients.

Of course, it is never easy or pleasant to have to address such problems with students or interns, but it is nevertheless a core responsibility of faculty and supervisors. Professions simply must insist on the highest standards of preparation and performance. You would want nothing less if you or a loved one were being treated by a professional and you would certainly not want any students or trainees who lacked competence in critical areas to be passed through the school or internship without those matters being addressed and resolved.

Given the concerns just mentioned, there is no single evaluation approach that works best but some mechanism of reliable and valid assessment of competency must be in place. 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 ([www.psychtrainingcouncils.org/Practicum%20Competencies%20FINAL%20203-07.pdf](http://www.psychtrainingcouncils.org/Practicum%20Competencies%20FINAL%20203-07.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.

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 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<sup>□</sup> 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<sup>□</sup>. Murphy and Kaffenberger (2007) noted that accountability involves using data for three purposes—monitoring student progress, assessing counseling programs, and demonstrating counselor effectiveness.

We 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 (see eResources). We will revisit the evaluatory component of supervision in [Chapter 5](#).

Now, with the paperwork and details in place, it's time to get on to the internship and start the real and exciting work you have been training to do.

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