

Obtaining an Internship/ Fieldwork Placement

The phone rings and it's EXACTLY who you want it to be. The director of the local hospital has heard about your stellar first year as a counseling grad student and is offering you an internship! It's a dream come true...then you wake up. It WAS a dream. The reality is obtaining a placement is something that all counseling students must go through. While it would be wonderful if your performance in school could speak for you, it turns out you will need to beat the pavement to get a placement. Below are six steps that you can take to make the process less painful.



1. Be Proactive

This means a little more than sending an email a day. As soon as you find out what your requirements are for the placement, schedule a time to meet with your academic advisor or placement coordinator to discuss potential places for your internship. Pick the brains of students who have already begun an internship and find out if their agency is looking for additional interns. Be sure to check your email regularly for opportunities gleaned by your placement advisor. Some sites like Idealist.org allow you to search for internships using keywords to help you narrow the field. Use these free services to jumpstart your search.

2. Be Selective

Your internship is not just something to pass the time until you can graduate. You can use it as an active learning experience. Instead of applying any and everywhere, be selective about where you would like to spend the next 600 hours of your life. Some questions you can ask yourself to help you narrow the field are:

- What population would I like to work with? Adults or children? Career counseling or chronically mentally ill?
- Do I want to work in outpatient or inpatient? Would I prefer a hospital setting or a community agency?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What hours and days will I be able to dedicate to the internship?
- Are there any factors that will affect my ability to successfully integrate into the agency (e.g., religious factors, sexual orientation focus, language barriers)?

3. Revise your resume

Foundations class. Group therapy. Adult psychotherapy class. It's easy to put off updating your resume when your focus is on completing the long list of class requirements. When you are putting yourself out there for the internship, you will need a resume that reflects your real world experience as well as your academic progress. If you have taken course work that provides you with a theoretical background for the

population you are interested in working with, highlight it on your resume. Be sure to list work experiences that are **relevant** and **recent**.

4. Do your research

Before you send out your cover letter, make a call, or walk through the door for the interview do your homework. What is the agency's mission and vision? Who do they work with and what is their goal? Are they married to a particular theoretical orientation or treatment modality? The more you know about the organization or agency, the better you will be able to speak to why you would be a good fit.

5. Know your skills, strengths, and weaknesses

It's a sure bet that at some point in your interview, someone will ask you to identify what you're good and something that you're working on. Don't go into the interview without identifying strengths and examples of those strengths, as well as areas that you are working on improving. If you can frame it in the context of the agency, even better (most places won't care if you're still trying to figure out the newest APA heading standard). While the urge to slightly exaggerate a particular skill set might be tempting, be sure to temper this by showing that you are there to learn and grow. There's no room for a "know-it-all" in this field.

6. Join your professional association

Most students will be required to have insurance coverage and most placement advisors will want to collect your certification of coverage before you can begin your internship. Make sure that you join the association beforehand and list it on your resume. Not only does this reflect your ability to plan ahead but it also shows your dedication to the field. The [ACA](#) and [AMHCA](#) are two associations that offer coverage when you become a member. There are different benefits that come with professional memberships, so do your homework before signing up for the year.