

**P495 Professional Practice Program Internship:  
Guidelines to Maximize your Learning Opportunities**

*Undergraduate Community Experience*

Richard W. Hubbard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Psychology, Indiana University South Bend

1. *Treat your placement like a semester long job interview!!*

- Be on time and dress appropriately.
- Volunteer to do the extras (e.g. help with fund raising drives, assist with special projects like grant applications or assessment plans or preparations for site visits related to agency certification).
- Meet as many professionals as possible make sure they know who you are and what you are interested in, but be sure you spend some time finding out what they do and how they got there.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions and, when it is appropriate, hand out praise for what you are seeing and learning.
- Ask for feedback about how you are doing and look for opportunities to expand your role.
- Respect issues of confidentiality and privacy at all times.
- Treat clients and co-workers with respect; demonstrate your abilities to be a "team player."

Ultimately when your internship experience is over, the better remembered you are and the more you are missed, the better your employment opportunities will be in the future.

2. *Treat your site like it is a living classroom!!*

- Attend in service training, conferences in the community, and any committee meetings you can.
- Job shadow: If you aren't allowed to do something you might be allowed to observe it being done (e.g. group therapy, in-takes etc.).
- Study agency forms and procedures and collect whatever they will let you take.  
Imbedded in these papers is a wealth of knowledge about how things work and examples of assessments, in-takes, evaluations, etc. you have been involved with.
- Look for opportunities to collaborate with other agencies.
- Ask for some suggested readings your supervisor thinks would be helpful.

3. *Network, Network, Network!!*

- Most of your agencies will have a board responsible for setting directions and approving changes within the agency. Know who the board members are, and recognize and greet them when they are on site. If you or a family member knows them, let the board members know about the positive experience you are having.
- Attend the lunches or after-work gatherings you are invited to. Personalizing your contact with people at the site (in a professional way) can lead to better training and employment opportunities.
- Identify key players in the work environment and find a way to spend time shadowing them or working with them.
- Keep your boundaries: Nothing destroys networking faster than basing it on your personal issues. This site is not where you should get personal advice and emotional support; it is where you demonstrate your ability to cope with life while working with others.

4. *Practice Positive Politics*

- Do not participate in or repeat any gossip. Keep your ears open and your mouth shut.
- If you experience problems at your site, treat them as though they were caused by miscommunication or the system. Do not personalize problems, do not characterize situations as “personality conflicts,” and do not take sides in conflicts that may exist within the agency.
- Do not dwell on agency problems or scandals from the past. Stay focused on solutions and plans for the future when you are having conversations with others.
- Don’t share criticisms of other agencies or any individuals with others, inside or outside your agency.
- Don’t be naïve: although your agencies are dedicated to caring for others that does not make their workers immune from bias, bigotry and personal vendettas. They are, after all, human beings who are over stressed and underpaid. Keep that in mind lest you judge some of them too harshly.
- Be optimistic, express yourself with a sense of hope, see the best in problems, and admire the efforts of others. Empathize with clients and professionals you encounter.
- Study your agency’s mission statement and point out ways you have observed staff reaching or exceeding those goals

5. *Don’t just disappear, leave them wanting more!!*

- As the end of your internship approaches, share your portfolio and summary of what you have done and learned with your supervisor and the executive director of the agency.
- Send thank you letters to all of the professionals who helped you during your time at the agency.
- If and only if you can afford it, a small donation in recognition of the good work they do will certainly be appreciated and keep you in their minds.
- Stop by a fundraiser or open house they may have after you have left, say hello and warm up your network of connections.

Follow these tips and you will maximize the learning experience and potential job opportunities at your site. Remember internships placements usually only work out if you work hard at them.