

Graduate Studies in Lifelong Learning Practicum Guidelines

Introduction

A key element of the adult education tradition has been its commitment to adult learners and their communities. In this practicum, you are invited to commit yourself to a time of public service. Your interests and the needs of your chosen community will determine the nature of this service. You will engage with technical problems, normative concerns and political complexities of your practicum site. Your practicum will be an opportunity for you to offer a valuable contribution to your world and to grow and develop as a critically reflective practitioner.

The practicum is an opportunity for you to develop your talents as an adult educator. You can test existing understandings of “state-of-the-art” practices and create innovative modes of practice to suit the intricacies of your learning contexts. As theory and practice are integrally related in all adult education contexts, your practicum will be a time of both action and reflection. You will hit the books, find new ideas and theories, try them out and explore how the ideas and practices can inform each other.

Structure of the Class

The practicum is a one-credit course running from September to April. The class includes the following stages:

1. A series of scheduled classes where the students develop and share their ideas and experiences with each other.
2. The identification of a feasible practicum site and the negotiation of a learning contract between the student, the practicum advisor and an on-site “mentor” who will provide guidance and feedback throughout the practicum process.
3. The implementation of practicum experience including regular contact with the practicum advisor.
4. The interim report in January highlighting practicum progress.
5. An on-site visit (physical or virtual) by the practicum advisor to address practicum learnings and issues.
6. A final report to communicate practicum experience, findings, and conclusions.
7. Students are encouraged to record their experiences and ideas in a practicum journal which may provide a useful source of information for their thesis (for those students who opt to write one). The journal will not be evaluated.
8. A poster presentation of the practicum experience that is shared with other students, community partners and the general public.

Evaluation

The practicum is a pass/fail course requiring the following:

1. The completion of 150 hours of practicum work including preparation time and note taking.
2. Attendance at the classes scheduled during the practicum
3. Completion and approval of a learning contract.
4. The filing of an interim report (approved by advisor).
5. Regular contact with the practicum advisor as specified in the student’s learning contract.
6. The organization of an on-site visit with the advisor and mentor.
7. Class presentation at the year-end meeting.
8. The filing of a final report (approved by advisor).
 - Critical reflection on experiences, findings, and conclusions (15 pages, double spaced)
 - A summary of hours spent on various practicum tasks
 - A 2-3 page evaluative commentary by the on-site mentor

Roles and Responsibilities

PRACTICUM ADVISOR

- To help students establish a meaningful and challenging practicum placement
- To conduct the orientation and run classes
- To support students on an ongoing basis and if problems arise
- To ensure the practicums are conducted ethically
- To offer constructive, periodic feedback
- To foster contact among practicum participants
- To foster positive relationships between MSVU and the larger community

ON-SITE MENTOR

- To acquaint the student with the practicum site including institutional and personal needs and expectations
- To provide ongoing guidance and feedback to the student on their practicum activities
- To consult with the practicum advisor regarding the practicum process
- To offer a final commentary on the student's activities
- To offer feedback to the practicum advisor about the practicum and ways in which it can be made more beneficial to the larger community

STUDENT

- To fulfill obligations outlined in the preceding "evaluation" section
- To read and follow the guidelines outlined here for the practicum
- To share their experiences with others regarding their experiences of the practicum.
- To conduct themselves professionally and ethically in all aspects of their practicum
- To remain open-minded and critical

OTHER ISSUES

Practicum in your workplace: The practicum is a voluntary service to the community aligned to a credit course. You may choose to conduct your practicum in your workplace, but you may not be paid for the work you do in your practicum. The hours you spend on practicum activities must be over and above your regular work commitments. You are responsible for all the work related to your practicum. You should not expect employees or co-workers to assist with the work involved in your practicum project (ie. ask a secretary to book rooms, arrange refreshments for a workshop).

Ethics: Your practicum contract will include a consideration of ethics. All aspects of your practicum must accord with MSVU Ethical Guidelines for research and practice. Be aware that whenever you are using human participants, you often have to obtain approval from an ethics committee (ie. if you were to conduct a needs assessment in a college classroom). This may often take a few weeks to pass, so you need to address this as soon as possible in the practicum. Anyone who participates in your practicum should do so on a voluntary basis (ie. attendance at a workshop you develop should not be mandated to students or employees).

Practica Breakdown: Occasionally, through no fault of their own, students may be abandoned by their practicum site. If early enough, students will be encouraged to establish another practicum plan. If it occurs later in the practicum process (ie. after the interim report), students will be asked to review the circumstances of the practicum breakdown in their final report.