

## How to Advocate for ... Your Ideal Practicum and Internship Experiences

**Sabrina Khan, BA, School Psychology EdS Candidate, 2022**

### **Describe a time when you had to advocate for a better practicum experience.**

When I first started practicum, I remember sitting in my supervisor's office and feeling like I had no tasks to do. Sometimes I'd start feeling bored. I realized I needed to speak up about what experiences I wanted and to be proactive, rather than wait to be assigned tasks. For example, I took time to familiarize myself with the teachers and the test kits my supervisor uses. I also got ideas from my professor and classmates. The district I was at provided fieldwork students with resources and ideas on what tasks we can do at our sites, so I utilized that as well. I made a list of what I wanted to accomplish and spoke with my supervisor about it. She was really supportive and, looking back, I think she needed to know more about my goals and what I wanted out of the practicum. I also learned to be more up front about my skill set, the knowledge I had from my classes, and that while I was there to learn, I was also capable of the tasks at hand. For example, my supervisor was working on an Individualized Education Program for a student. She had an instructional aide collect the student's behavioral data, and I offered to help graph it and check in periodically with the aide because I had experience doing that from a previous course.

My experiences in advocating for an improved practicum experience really helped when I began my internship this year.

### **What are some skills that would be helpful when advocating in these situations?**

Clear communication with your supervisor is crucial if you don't feel comfortable, are feeling overwhelmed, or need help on a task. Also, you need to be proactive. Really take initiative and familiarize yourself with how things are at your site and with the staff/teachers. Don't just stay holed up in your supervisor's office! For example, I assisted with student pick-up and drop-off and got to interact with staff members that I wouldn't have gotten the chance to meet. I connected with the school's reading interventionist. I got to observe her sessions with students and how these interventions are conducted.

### **What advice would you give individuals just starting their practicum or internship?**

Come in with a plan on the kinds of experiences you want and discuss it with your supervisor at the start of your fieldwork. I'd also recommend interviewing them and getting to learn more about their education, work background, opinions on the district, job responsibilities, and their goals for you. Also discuss the courses you are taking and if your courses require any assignments from your school site. Remember to go at your own pace! You may find that some of your classmates may be more advanced in things like counseling or providing behavioral support, which can make you feel like you are behind in your training. Fieldwork is really

exciting since we are finally getting to do what we've been studying for, but you don't want to take on tasks that you aren't equipped to handle. So don't feel shy or embarrassed about asking questions either! Also don't sell yourself short. Keep in mind the skill set and knowledge you have acquired and your capabilities. If it will help, write down the skills you learned from your courses/previous experiences. Remember there is always something you can be doing at your site, so don't sit around bored! Don't be disheartened if at first your supervisor seems territorial or cautious with you when it comes to report writing (since at the end of the day they have to defend the report). Proactively seek the experiences you want and familiarize yourself with your site, the staff, classes, and teachers, as this can help make it easier for you to gain more experience.

### **What advice would you give individuals about advocating for new experiences during your practicum or internship?**

At the end of the fall semester, my program had us reflect on our experiences based on the NASP Practice Model domains and make an action plan for spring semester. My program also had my supervisor take a survey to evaluate me and what kinds of activities I did at my site. This helped me see areas where I wanted more experience and develop a list for the spring semester. Whether or not it's required, periodically reflecting on your experiences is beneficial. If at this point you feel you are not getting the experiences you want, I strongly encourage you to communicate that with your supervisor. If your supervisor is not responsive to your needs and experiences you want, remember to reach out to your professors and district psych if needed.

### **What advice would you give individuals toward the end of their practicum on how to advocate for internship experiences?**

At the end of my practicum, my program had me do a final reflection on my experience and what kinds of activities I did at my site (and how much of what I did aligned with the different NASP domains). I also had to write out my plan and goals for internship and what I can do to reach those goals. I strongly recommend students do that! Look at the NASP domains too and see if you had a well-rounded experience. If not, then make it your goal to have that experience in internship. I highly recommend students ask during their internship interview what kinds of experiences interns can receive with the district. Focus on determining if the district really wants their interns to learn, rather than being placed with school psychologists who are behind in their work. And finally, always keep in mind what your skill set is, as it will help when you are advocating for additional experience.