

**Notes from *Continuing Conversations: Online Internships and Practicums***  
**National Council on Family Relations, May 28, 2020**  
**Presenters: Valerie Albert and Erin Lavendar-Stott from South Dakota State University**

Practicum in a Pandemic: One Universities' Experience

- Used NCFR/CFLE recommendations to help guide directions and find resources
- Adhered to CDC guidelines
- Understand agency policies and work with site supervisors
  - Both work together to form creative ideas
- Be flexible and adaptable
  - Might not end up looking like a traditional program
- Clearly communicate with students and internship sites
  - Even if it is not the final answer, be transparent with all involved
- Develop a team/network approach
  - Maintain relationships with sites, but do not burden the sites. Still help students find ones that would work.
- Hands-on learning opportunity preferred, but must be flexible to current events

Undergraduate Practicum/Internship at South Dakota State University (SDSU)

- 240-hour internship experience (6 credits)
- Practicum is offered during Spring and Summer semesters
  - No Fall Practicum
  - About 9 faculty (1 remote), both within and outside of the Department
- Student Context
  - Land Grant institution: Open-access to education
  - First Gen, regional, employed part-time or full-time while in school
  - 2020 Enrollment
    - Spring 2020: 17 students
    - Summer 2020: 51 students
  - Students really want hands-on experience. They were worried about having to work as research assistant. They needed to recognize that even onsite positions involve computer work.
  - Encourage students to think outside the box, but be aware of agencies' guidelines.
- Pre-practicum coursework – 1 credit course. Keeps them on pace to find an internship. All sites are pre-approved. Not sure how feasible this will be as an option going forward.
- Feedback from participants that represented other schools:
  - We have our students do a lot of the pre-practicum activities as well, but they don't get credit for it. Definitely something to think about for the future! I was wondering because our internship requires a 3-hour weekly class in addition to the on-site hours and I'm unsure how I will adapt that for Fall.
  - That is how our university does it. They do 120 hours in the field for 2 credits and the other 1 credit (3 total) is an online seminar class to teach professionalism and career application. They do this all the same semester.

SDSU Solutions

- Option 1: A Traditional Practicum
  - 240-hour experience with internship site

- Priority given to students graduating in August. Encouraged juniors to drop course and wait until next year.
- Flexibility with “direct” contact hours
  - Students could complete work remotely
  - Allowed administrative work to count toward practicum
  - Administration at SDSU made it clear that they were flexible as to the type of work that was done under internship.
  - Sites needed to know that students didn’t need to work with families directly.
  - Be careful not to overwhelm sites with regulations that were previously required.
- Option 2: Alternative/ Independent Study Practicum
  - Student is matched to a faculty supervisor
    - Great alternative for students who did not have a site.
    - Students completed resume-type form to identify comfort and experience level in various tasks. Also looked at future career goals. This allowed an understanding of comfort level with the students in various areas and matched them with faculty.
    - Alternative project ideas created by HDFS faculty (listed below)
  - 240-hour hands-on learning experience
    - Does not necessarily have to be teaching or research focused; they can learn more about their career path
    - Consistency between students is important
  - Faculty members were extremely helpful in working with students.
    - Faculty found it to be rewarding as well; they were not paid extra for their work.
- Option 3: Hybrid Practicum
  - Combined 240-hour experience between agency and faculty supervisor
    - Reserved for student when site cannot provide all 240 hours
    - Part of the hours offered through agencies and additional hours met through work with faculty supervisor.
  - Possible long-term solution with students going forward.
    - Working well so far
    - Allows students flexibility with goals and help faculty fulfill needs. Can be more hands on and give students more responsibility in fulfilling their own goals.
  - Did receive some negative feedback from students in that “computer work was not hands on.”
- Option 4: Coursework
  - Least preferred option and typically only for those who were sick or had a family member to care for
  - Took pre-identified courses.
    - Could be offered outside of Department.

Example Alternative Ideas (additional information included in handout)

- Miscellaneous Faculty Projects
- Professional Interviews/Networking
- Professional Development Web Series
- Special Topics Research and/or Documentaries
- COVID-19 Oral History and Archives
- Program/Coursework Adaptations
- Professional Development Workshops (i.e. mini-conferences, human subjects training, mental health first aid, etc.)
- Employment Hours (up to 60 hours)
- Encouraged use of webinars, Ted talks, tele-health, mentoring, deep dive into research topic.
- Additional options included: program or coursework adaptation into online options, forming infographics, organizing mini conferences, workshops, webinars, policy briefs, infographics
- Additional feedback received from participants that work at other institutions:
  - My students got about halfway done with their internships. One of the things we did to finish the semester was to have them do two additional papers. One was a structured exploration of our

professional ethics. We had students give specific examples of ethical issues from the internship experiences they did have early in the semester. We encouraged them to have both micro and macro practice examples. Then we met via video chat and had some guided discussion about it. This was beneficial to the students, but challenging.

- One way we proactively planned for the summer and fall semester was contacting internship sites that were able to move to a remote or telework platform and then helped match students to sites with availability.

### Our Solution: Strengths and Challenges

- Strengths
  - Hybrid
  - Tailored to student needs and professional goals
  - One-on-one mentoring
  - Possible long-term solution
  - Application of alternative projects to post-graduate career
  - Direct coordinator to faculty communication
  - Collaboration is key
- Challenges
  - Greatest challenge is balancing the hours across the sites.
  - Hybrid
  - Instructor keeping track of multiple paths to 240
  - Surprising life events
  - Willingness of students to embrace alternative unknowns
  - This is not a “research assistant” position. (lots of rumors)
  - Supervisors developing remote projects
  - Greatest challenge is working from home.
  - P&T – not recognizing this as service yet
    - Helped that South Dakota State faculty mostly had summer contracts to conduct these practicums/internships

### Feedback surrounding NCFR CFLE-approved program internship requirement

- NCFR requires 120 hours practicum in Family Life Education for CFLE-approved coursework. CFLE checklist includes listing of internship/practicum course which must appear on the CFLE applicant’s transcript indicating the same course title and course #.
- NCFR does not require CFLE applicants to provide detail on the location or nature of their internship. They rely on oversight of internship supervisor/faculty to ensure the experience is meaningful and relevant to FLE.
- In instance of Option 4 (listed above), NCFR preference would be that the CFLE applicant provide some type of application of FLE principles to a course. Could they create a lesson plan or teach a session, or some other application of the content of the course to the practice of FLE?
- Initially NCFR maintained requirement of no pass/fail grade or grade below C- but received push-back due to need for flexibility on the parts of the schools. Policy was modified to allow Pass/Fail even if grade is below C-. This is intended to be a temporary adjustment.
- Bottom line is that for the Certified Family Life Educator application, NCFR will honor whatever arrangement is made by a CFLE-approved program for meeting the internship/practicum requirement for their students.
- CFLE-approved programs do not need to provide detail regarding the internship/practicum experience to NCFR. If the internship/practicum included on each CFLE-approved program’s checklist is indicated on the transcript, NCFR will accept it. However, NCFR encourages Family Science programs to share their ideas and activities for dealing with online internship experiences.