



Expanding Mental Health Services Through Graduate Student Field Interns: Best Practices and Key Considerations for Colleges

Mental Health Improvement through Community Colleges

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Resource
Highlights

Amidst the high prevalence of mental health challenges among students, many community colleges lack the resources and staffing to meet the demand for student mental health services. One approach to expanding colleges' capacity to support student mental health that may require fewer resources than hiring additional staff is by hosting graduate level interns (such as master's level social work or counseling students) as part of their graduate program's field education. This resource is intended to shed light on the process of hosting graduate level field interns as a means of expanding college's counseling capacity.

Field Education Fundamentals

Field education is the process through which graduate students in social work and counseling psychology programs receive hands-on experience and training in the field, oftentimes at external partnering organizations.

Field interns usually work **part-time** at their field site for **2-3 academic semesters**, typically committing between 15-25 hours per week. Interns might work on-site, remotely, or in a hybrid arrangement to accrue these hours, depending on the specific needs of the field site and the intern.

Field interns are typically allowed to conduct clinical work without the immediate presence of a supervisor, but are required to receive continued guidance and clinical oversight from their on-site supervisor through regular structured meetings, commonly referred to as **clinical supervision**.

Specific tasks that field interns complete are collaboratively determined based on the needs of the field site and the intern's training program, though these tasks often include:

- Coordinating intake sessions
- Conducting counseling sessions
- Facilitating group counseling or peer support groups
- Carrying out mental health screening initiatives
- Hosting mental health workshops and events
- Leading campus outreach efforts

Potential Benefits of Hosting Field Interns

While hosting field interns may not be the right solution for every college, the potential benefits of this practice can include:

- Expanded clinical capacity
- Enhanced mental health service provision
- Minimal costs to colleges

Key Requirements for Hosting Field Interns

In order to cultivate a mutually beneficial partnership that meets your college's needs while fostering a rich learning environment for interns, colleges must have at least one fully licensed staff counselor to provide clinical supervision and oversight to field interns.

Each intern must receive one hour of weekly clinical supervision from their on-site supervisor. The supervising counselor should also have time to support an intern's onboarding, offer real-time guidance, and handle any meetings, training, or paperwork required by an intern's educational program.

Therefore, your college's supervising counselor should expect to dedicate a minimum of 2 hours per week to supporting a field intern.

Best Practices & Continued Reading

Explore the full version of this toolkit available at mitrends.org for further details as well as a comprehensive list of best practices for hosting field interns.