

# Practicum Experiences Within the Human Development and Family Studies Department

Kevin Barlow

02/21/2020



The practicum experience within the Human Development and Family Studies department is designed to be a step that bridges a student's transformation from a purely academic approach to the human services field to participation in the field, under the supervision of both a university and agency representative. During the decades carrying out this practicum, the department has built relationships with a number of human services

agencies in the community to facilitate this process. These relationships consist of settings across the human development lifespan, as well as in agencies in the mental health, legal, and educational spheres. With a varied number of emphases within the department, the diversity of placement opportunities provides an experience tailored for every student's professional interests.

Students with a Child Development emphasis are able to supplement their experience of working in the department's child development lab with an off-campus experience. This could include working at a day care or pre-school setting in either a home- or community-based setting. Additionally, both local school districts have onsite preschools at most of their elementary schools, providing many opportunities for practicum. A student may also work with older children in these settings by participating in the afterschool clubs held. Students with an emphasis on Human Development Lifespan also get a practical experience in working in local assisted living, rehabilitation, and hospice placements, which prepare them to begin a career in these fields.

There is a strong alliance between the department and many of the mental health and public agencies within the community. This provides opportunities for Family and Community Services emphasis students to be involved and to determine which niche may be a good fit for them, as they approach their school graduation. A few agencies where students often engage in practicum include CAPSA, The Family Place, and the Logan Family Center. These settings allow students to assist in the management of crises, rehabilitation, and assisting individuals and families to stabilize within the community. These settings, as well as other agencies and USU Extension placements, provides the opportunity for family life education and preventative work.

We also assist students in the Family Finance emphasis to obtain community experience through practicum placements that supplement the work they do on campus, at the Family Life Center, engaged in financial counseling.

Some of the sites where these students engage in practicum include banks, investment settings, mortgage lenders, and working with taxes. In addition to the many agencies in the Cache Valley area where students frequently engage in practicum, students at the regional campuses also participate in this experience in their local communities. Indeed, we currently have students working with agencies in the Unitah Basin, Tooele, and Salt Lake communities, as well as a student completing her practicum in Las Vegas and another completing hers in Peru!

During site visits, the agency representatives have frequently commented on how well prepared the students from this department have been. This appears to

relate both to their knowledge about the field of interest as well as in having developed interpersonal skills to assist them in building professional relationships with both clientele and coworkers. Indeed, the practicum placement frequently leads to post-practicum employment for students. In many other cases, it leads to relevant experience and a positive referral that assists with gaining employment elsewhere. Data collected from students overwhelmingly indicate that they find the practicum experience to be one of the most useful tasks they engage in during their academic careers. The department is pleased with the practicum experience, the wonderful agencies who support this endeavor, and the excellent students who have represented the department.