

Frequently Asked Questions About the CSPA Practicums (CSPA 6383)

Q. What is the Practicum?

The practicum is an experiential course for students in the CSPA program. The practicum is an opportunity for you to design a project to learn about some aspect of student services by actually working with students who use those services. The practicum is intended to introduce you to the practice of professional student services.

Q. When does the Practicum occur?

The practicum comes near the completion of the CSPA program, and ideally after the satisfactory completion of the practicum prerequisites, CSPA 6333 and ELAD 6333. Those prerequisites will prepare you for the interactions you will have with students in the office where you conduct the practicum. In certain cases, the practicum may be taken before, or along with the prerequisite courses, but only with the approval of the CSPA academic advisor.

Q. When is the Practicum offered?

The CSPA practicum is offered each semester, in the fall and spring, and covering both summer sessions.

Q. How long does the practicum take to complete?

The CSPA practicum requires at least 100 hours of supervised practice, of which 40 hours are in direct contact with the students you are serving, 10 hours are in contact with other student services professionals, and one hour each week in contact with the practicum supervisor.

Q. Where can the practicum be conducted?

The CSPA Practicum can be conducted at any two-year or four-year college or university, with the approval of the CSPA academic advisor. Students enrolled at the A-State campus in Jonesboro may conduct the practicum at that campus with the approval of Beth Silverthorn in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, who also assigns practicum locations on that campus. A-State practicums are conducted under the practicum faculty, Dr. Rick Stripling.

Practicums conducted on any other campus are approved by the practicum faculty member, Dr. Les Wyatt.

Students may select any location for the CSPA practicum.

Q. In which practicum course should I register?

After approval has been granted by the CSPA academic advisor, you may register for the CSPA 6383 CRN indicating the practicum at A-State, or the CSPA 6383 CRN at any other campus.

Q. How is the practicum organized?

There are several steps for organizing each practicum:

1. You are responsible for determining the general student services area (housing, student conduct, advising, etc.) in which you want to conduct your practicum.
2. You are responsible for determining a project that you want to conduct in that selected services area. The project you select should be intended to give you a better understanding of how the area operates, how it serves students, and what you intend to learn through the practicum experience. The project may help you decide if you would be suited to a career in that area of student services.
3. You are responsible for selecting the campus that has that selected student services area. The campus may be in any geographical location that you find to be convenient.
4. You are responsible to identify a professional student services employee in that selected area who will agree to oversee your practicum. The professional should represent successful student affairs experiences over several years, hold at least a master's degree, and have responsibility for employees, student services, and fulfillment of the institutional mission for students who are served by the selected area.

The supervisor must be willing to give you an orientation to the office, to introduce you to other employees, to provide you opportunities to work directly with students, to give you periodic reviews and advice about your performance, to answer your questions about the work of the office, and to give feedback to you about the objectives and personal outcomes you have defined for the practicum.

The practicum is not a clerical assignment in the office you select. It is rather to be a responsible assignment to help the office achieve student success.

5. When you have defined the project, the student services area, the campus and the supervisor, provide that information to your practicum faculty member (Dr. Stripling or Dr. Wyatt) using the Appendix A form.
6. The practicum faculty member will contact the practicum supervisor to coordinate each person's responsibilities to assure your successful practicum.

Q. How do I arrange the practicum schedule?

The daily and weekly practicum schedule is arranged between you and the supervisor. If the agreed-upon schedule is interrupted (illness, travel, personal issues, etc.), you must seek approval in advance, or notify the supervisor of your emergency. You should conduct the practicum schedule as if you are an employee: if you are given responsibilities, you should demonstrate your professionalism by doing what you have agreed to do when it is expected of you.

Q. How do I report on the practicum activities?

You are required to provide to your faculty member (Dr. Stripling or Dr. Wyatt) a weekly report of your activities using the Appendix B form. These reports form a continuous chronicle of your practicum, and the reports are retained for any future reference about your practicum, such as employment recommendations. After the completion of the practicum, you will report on your overall practicum evaluation using Appendix C.

Q. How is my practicum evaluated?

In the practicum course, there are no tests or exams during the practicum. Instead, the practicum is subjectively evaluated by your faculty member based upon the weekly reports and your evaluation of the practicum, the supervisor's evaluation, and a summary evaluation that is made by the faculty member and the supervisor. The final practicum course grade is recorded in the Blackboard grade sheet, and is the only grade assigned for practicum.

If you take other courses concurrently with practicum, all of the assignments, requirements and expectations of those courses would still be applied.

Q. Do students take practicum along with other CSPA courses?

Most students do take practicum as a part of a larger course load. Most students who take practicum along with other courses, even as part of a full load of four courses, have successfully completed all courses during the practicum semester. Your ability to take a full or partial load depends entirely on your personal commitments and the discipline you bring to your academic studies.

It is also perfectly acceptable to take practicum as the only course in a particular semester.

Q. What if I am already working as a student services professional?

Because the practicum is intended to introduce students into the professional practices of student services, the course may not be appropriate for professionals who have

significant previous experience in practice. The CSPA program, leading to a practitioners degree, would recognize significant previous experience as fulfilling the practicum practice requirement, and a different course could be substituted for practicum.

But active current practitioners may also elect to conduct the practicum to address an interest in learning new techniques, solving problems in the area where they now work, exploring new areas for possible career changes, or to gain additional practical experiences for advancement. These options can be explored with the CSPA program advisor.

It is also possible to conduct the practicum where you now work, if you are employed as a practitioner in student services. This alternative would be appropriate to master a new system or procedure, to prepare for an internal promotion, or some other event that would provide an alternative to your current day-to-day responsibilities. Again, this option would need to be explored with the CSPA program advisor.

The goal in the practicum is to prepare you for practice in student services, or to advance your capabilities beyond your present level of knowledge or expertise.

Q. If I currently have employment in student services and decide not to do the practicum, what are my alternatives?

A course can be substituted for the practicum requirement. The substitution must be approved in advance of registration by the practicum advisor.

Q. Can the practicum be conducted outside higher education?

On rare occasions, students have been approved to conduct practicums outside higher education. That allowance is granted on the basis on the practicum concept, the expertise of other persons to be involved with the student during the practicum, the proposed learning outcomes, and only after approval by the CSPA program advisor

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Q. Can the practice be conducted on a different academic schedule?

Some practicums have been conducted at institutions that use the trimester or quarterly systems. Practicums have been extended over two semesters. Unusual academic schedules, such as a study-abroad program that provided student services, have also been approved for practicums in certain circumstances?

Q. What if I define a practicum situation that proves to be unsatisfactory, or not what I really wanted.

On rare occasions, the practicum has been redefined with the consent of all involved. In those cases the student is responsible to restructure the practicum and to complete the experience within the parameters of the expectation for number of hours and reporting requirements. It is possible to drop the practicum course (like any other academic

course), and to reregister for practicum at a later time with the understanding that course tuition must be paid again. This is an unusual and atypical circumstance, however: The large majority of practicums are completed where and when originally conceived, and completed with a high degree of satisfaction for all involved

Q. How does practicum compare to other courses in the CSPA program?

Other CSPA courses are structured as academic offerings, with online assignments, required readings, tests, papers, interactions with other CSPA students and the instructor, and conducted on a schedule defined by content and delivery considerations.

The practicum is different because you define the content, your assignments are those you make for yourself to learn practical applications of knowledge and information, and because the course is focused on your own experiences in actually working with students who come seeking your attention, assistance, and your expertise.

Previous CSPA students have described their practicums as being “when it all came together,” and they could see how the theories and lessons in other CSPA courses are actually applied in practice. They gained confidence in their own abilities to step into the real world of student affairs as a professional career.

Q. If I conduct my practicum in the summer, do I have to pay tuition in both summer terms?

No. Tuition and fees are paid only for the practicum course itself, regardless of the period of time or number of terms or semesters necessary for the practicum.

Please direct any questions regarding CSPA practicum to the program advisor, Dr. Les Wyatt, at leswyatt@astate.edu.

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