

Some Frequently Asked Questions About the CSPA Practicums (CSPA 6383)

Q. What is the Practicum?

The practicum is a required course for students in the CSPA program. The practicum is an opportunity for you to learn about some aspect of student services either by actually working with students who use those services, or by conducting an independent study project.

Q. What are my options for Practicum?

The practicum course awards three hours of academic credit. Those credits are included in the 36-hour requirement for the CSPA degree, so the practicum course requirement must be fulfilled in one of two ways:

- An experiential practicum is offered for CSPA students who have not been employed in higher education previously. This type of practicum is designed to introduce students to the functions of a student services office on a two-year or four-year campus including the A-State Jonesboro campus, and to place the CSPA student in direct contact with students served by that office, under the oversight of an experienced practitioner.

The experiential practicum is overseen by Dr. Les Wyatt.

- A project practicum is offered for CSPA students who are currently employed, or previously have been employed in higher education. The project is designed by the CSPA student in consultation with the project director, Dr. Rick Stripling. This type of practicum is designed to give the CSPA student a deeper insight into a particular area of student services, and to conduct research that will assist in career development and advancement.

The project practicum is overseen by Dr. Rick Stripling.

- Beginning in Summer 2020, either practicum option must be completed by each CSPA student. There are no academic courses that may be substituted for CSPA 6383 CSPA Practicum. Both the experiential section and the project section award credit under the CSPA 6383 registration.

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, ELAD 6333 and CSPA 6333 (which also may be taken concurrently with CSPA 6383). Those prerequisites will

prepare you for the interactions you will have with students in the office where you conduct the experiential practicum, or will prepare you to conduct a project. In certain cases, the experiential practicum may be taken before, or along with the prerequisite courses, but only with the approval of the CSPA academic advisor, Dr. Wyatt (leswyatt@astate.edu).

Q. When is the Practicum offered?

Both the CSPA experiential and project practicums are offered each semester, in the fall and spring, and in both summer sessions. The project-based practicum is a 7-week course, offered in the first or second half of the fall, or spring, or summer semesters.

The experiential practicum course is offered as a 15-week course in the fall, spring, and summer semesters, but that 15-week window is only to permit the student to schedule the practicum when it is convenient with the site supervisor. Around 50 hours of activity are expected in the experiential practicum, but those hours may be distributed over the full semester, or may be concentrated in several weeks. The duration depends upon the schedule defined by the student and the site supervisor.

Q. How long does the practicum take to complete?

The CSPA experiential practicum requires approximately 50 hours of supervised practice, of which 30 hours are in direct contact with the students you are serving, at least 10 hours are in contact with other student services professionals, and at least 10 hours in contact with the practicum site supervisor.

The project-based practicum completion requirements are defined based on the project as agreed upon by Dr. Stripling.

Q. Where can the practicum be conducted?

The CSPA experiential practicum can be conducted at any two-year or four-year college or university, including the A-State Jonesboro campus, with the approval of the CSPA academic advisor, Dr. Les Wyatt. Contact Dr. Wyatt (leswyatt@astate.edu) if you wish to conduct an experiential practicum.

With specific approval, a student may conduct a special project to fulfill the practicum requirement. The project must be defined in consultation with Dr. Rick Stripling, who oversees the project development. Approval for a special project practicum must be approved by the CSPA academic advisor, Dr. Wyatt, in advance of registration for the practicum. The project-based practicum may be conducted at any location.

Q. How do I register for practicum?

After approval has been granted by Dr. Wyatt you may register for the CSPA 6383 CRN noted on the course schedule. You will not be able to register for practicum until the CSPA advisor grants approval. The advisor must first approve your participation in any of the options you have for practicum, as outlined above

Q. How is the experiential practicum organized?

There are several steps for organizing each experiential practicum:

1. You are responsible for determining the student services area (housing, student conduct, advising, etc.) in which you want to conduct your practicum.
2. You are responsible for determining an activity that you want to conduct in that selected services area. The activity 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 which has that selected student services area. The campus may be in any geographical location that you find to be convenient personally.
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. Once you have defined the project, or 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, found as a tab in the left column of the CSPA website. The practicum faculty member may contact the practicum supervisor to coordinate each person's responsibilities to assure your successful practicum.

- 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 an 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. Instead, the practicum is subjectively evaluated by your faculty member based upon the weekly reports and your own 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 apply.

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

Most students take practicum as a part of a larger course load. Previously, 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 experiential practicum may not be appropriate for professionals who have previous experience in practice. Most CSPA students who are now working in student services will opt for the project practicum option.

But active, current practitioners may also elect to conduct an experiential 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, or I have been employed in student services previously and decide not to do the practicum, what are my alternatives?

If you have employment experience in student services and have the prerequisites (see the third question, above), you may conduct a project-based course under the direction of Dr. Rick Stripling. The project is a concept that you and Dr. Stripling jointly develop, and conduct within the time parameters of any given semester. You would still register for CSPA 6383 *CSPA Practicum*, but in lieu of an assignment to an area of student services, you would be able to define an activity of personal interest to you, or of value to the field of student services. The definition of the project would occur before you actually begin the project, and after approval by Dr. Stripling.

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.

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. Some practicums have been extended over two regular 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 after the initial experience has begun. In those cases the student is responsible to restructure the practicum and to complete the experience or project 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: The large majority of practicums are completed where, when, and as 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 once for the practicum course itself, regardless of the period of time or number of terms or semesters necessary to complete the practicum.

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

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