

Guidelines for Internship Site Selection

HSC 4800 – Health Education Professional Development

HSC4800 allows you 12 weeks to seek out available internship possibilities. Because the internship can be an important step towards obtaining your first professional position, it is very important that your decision be made carefully to ensure a meaningful and successful internship experience. The below list of guidelines (recommended by the department) should assist you with your internship selection, and will serve as the basis of approval for your proposed internship site by the internship coordinator.

Is the internship site in a feasible geographic location?

There are many agencies in Florida and around the nation that may provide you with a meaningful learning experience during your internship. However, the location of the site must be chosen carefully. Many students remain here in Gainesville out of convenience or they may elect to go home to complete their internships as it usually saves money in living expenses. To better insure that you will have a minimum number of outside distractions the department prefers students to complete their internship in a location that is familiar to you and where family and/or financial support will be readily available. Internships that are not in Gainesville or your hometown can be approved, however, sufficient evidence that careful consideration has been given to the decision to intern away from your home base must be evident. Students should be prepared to show how living expenses and personal support such as family ties will be provided for. The student's academic performance, while a major in the department are also heavily considered in evaluating the appropriateness of an internship site away from home. These criteria are used to insure that the student will have the best opportunity to benefit fully from the internship experience.

Can the agency provide you with appropriate supervision?

There should be at least one person available to you during the internship for guidance in the performance of your duties. This person should work closely enough with you so that they will be in a position to give a detailed evaluation of your performance as an intern. It is preferred that your supervisor have employee or internship supervisory experience, a background in health education or a closely related field and be experienced and familiar enough with the agency's activities to provide you with appropriate leadership.

Does the agency provide health education services?

The agency that you choose should be one that offers health education/promotion programs as a major part of their services OR at minimum offers definite and well thought out opportunities for the creation of health education programs with full support of the agency administration. The programs should be such that the agency is willing to allow you to take an active role in implementation.

Does the agency have previous experience with undergraduate interns?

It is preferable but not required that the agency/supervisor have experience in working with health education interns at the undergraduate level.

Does the agency offer a variety of activities and projects for intern participation?

It is recommended that the agency have a wide variety of activities in which the intern can become involved. *The intern should have the opportunity to complete a major project or several smaller projects.* These projects may include but are not limited to activities such as: public speaking engagements, developing/implementing/evaluating educational programs, coordinating events (health fairs, workshops, conferences), business/professional writing (meeting/committee minutes, newsletter articles, letters/memos), designing brochures/pamphlets or other educational materials), marketing activities of the agency's health education programs, and exposure to the agency's operating structure.

Does the agency provide opportunities to network within the community?

Networking opportunities within the community are very beneficial especially for those who wish to obtain employment in the community in which they intern. Networking will also play a role in making you a better resource person for the clients of your agency.

Is the agency's schedule compatible with the internship schedule requirements?

It is important that the agency be able to provide 40 hours/week of work time for the 15 weeks of the internship (or 12 weeks in the summer) or for part-time interns, at least 20 hours/week for 15 weeks. There are no particular requirements for the agency's hours of operation or shifts in which you work as long the shifts can provide a sufficient number of working hours.

☐ **Is office space, including a computer available to the intern?**

It is almost certain that some, if not most, of the work you are involved in as an intern will require access to a computer. Office or at minimum sufficient desk space to carry out your duties will also be an important aspect of completing your projects. In addition, if projects you will be working on will require funds to operate, it is important that the agency is able to make those funds available to you.

☐ **Does the agency offer potential employment opportunities?**

Depending on your plans after graduation, it may be important for you to seek out an agency that may offer future employment opportunities or referrals for employment. It is important to note that a significant number of students pursuing employment in health education after graduation from this department find employment with the internship agency or through networking contacts made during the internship period.

Financial Considerations

It is important that students be aware that the majority of internship sites, especially community health agencies, are unable to provide payment to interns due to various budget constraints. For this reason, students should plan ahead for how they will manage financially for the semester of the internship. It is recommended that students prepare a budget of expenses and income for the internship semester and have a plan of action in place prior to beginning the internship.

Students will be required to register and pay tuition for the 15 credit-hour internship course for the semester. However, your education, instead of a lecture in a classroom, will come in the form of a 40-hour per work experience at the site. For this reason working part-time outside of the internship is extremely difficult and highly discouraged.

Although there may at first seem to be a great disparity between the benefits of a full-time internship and having a regular semester of courses, it is important to understand the benefits of the internship.

(1) **Work Experience**

One of the toughest double standards graduating seniors are faced with in the job search is the lack of full-time work experience. Employers want it, but because you have been in school for the last four years you haven't had the opportunity to get that kind of experience. Completion of a professional internship gives you a very valuable tool in the job search...proof that you can actually do what you were trained to do those last four years.

(2) **References**

Another powerful tool in the job search, is having someone that can vouch for your abilities. When you begin your job search you will of course say and do everything that you can to prove to a potential employer that you will be the best person for the job. However, employers like to have an unbiased, opinion of that and having a supervisor who can make that assessment for you can go a long way in the job search.

(3) **Practice**

This is your opportunity to test the waters and to really find your strengths and weaknesses. You finally have the opportunity to put your skills to work and find out what aspects of the health education profession that you are best at. It can also be seen as a time to make your first mistakes in the professional world. By nature of being a student, it is understood that this is your first time out in the field and mistakes are usually expected and tolerated better by employers. This gives you time to develop your weaker areas and enhance your stronger points.

(4) **Transition Stage**

A full-time internship offers for many, a much needed transition from student to professional. Most students prior to graduating from college have never held a full-time job. The long hours of the workday can be quite a change to adjust to for those accustomed to coming home after class and taking a nap in the afternoon. As the semester progresses, you begin to take on a more professional persona and by the time you enter your first job, you have actually turned into a real grown-up!

(5) **The Possibility of Future Employment**

As mentioned previously, many health education students have gone on to find employment with the agencies for which they interned. What better way to interview for a job than to actually work as an intern. In the event of a job opening, you have the greatest advantage over any other applicant for that position in that you have had the opportunity to show the employers first hand your capabilities.