

## **THE CHALLENGE OF MANAGING OFF-CAMPUS PRACTICUM**

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### **Introduction**

The title of this presentation “The challenge of managing off-campus practicum” conveys a reality we all face with respect to creating and maintaining these experiences for our students. It is a challenge. There are numerous issues which make the role of off-campus practicum coordinator more complex and difficult than it has been in the past. Off-campus practicum coordinators must successfully represent the needs and interests of three diverse groups: the training institution, the individual students we place, and the off-site supervisors. Those of you choosing to attend this session are likely experiencing some of these challenges first hand. In this “exchange” we will first address some of the issues that contribute to these challenges and then I will describe programs and policies we employ at the University of New Hampshire in our efforts to provide a quality off-campus practicum experience both for our students and cooperating clinical educators. Finally, we will allow time for discussion and exchange of information from participants.

### **Issues Influencing Off-Campus Practicum**

Off-campus practicum experiences play a vital role in the education of future speech-language pathologists and audiologists. Universities need to maintain a varied network of off-campus supervisors to assure that we offer our students the breadth of clinical experience required for certification. Although supervision of students is an additional responsibility, professionals in off-campus settings have historically been willing to assume this role. Experienced professionals recognize there is much to be gained from supervising students. Serving as a clinical educator contributes to continued professional growth of the supervisor. Many supervisors report they view the student interaction as a way

to remain current with new theories and information that students bring from their classes. Experienced clinicians see it as their opportunity to give something back to the profession. Others see bringing students into their organization as a good recruiting tool. Despite these reported benefits, some off-campus supervisors are beginning to question the feasibility of continuing to serve in this role. Current issues that may influence a supervisor's willingness to accept a student and factors that influence the number and type of hours a student is able to obtain include:

- Productivity Expectations – Rehab managers or supervisors may feel the time spent with a student could reduce billable hours
- Supervision responsibilities for Speech-Language Assistants
- Supervisors may already feel overwhelmed with their own job responsibilities, increased caseloads, case manager responsibilities, staffing reductions in the facility, and the expectation to “do more with less”.
- Changing Practice Patterns (i.e., fewer children with speech issues seen in the schools.)
- Changing Health Care Patterns (i.e., shortened length of stay for patients in medical settings.)
- Federal HCFA restrictions on reimbursement for services provided by students and “line of sight” observation requirements.

In addition, staffing cutbacks in some settings have significantly reduced the number of potential supervisors. Facilities that may have employed one or more full time speech-language pathologists now have only per diem staff. These realities have created significant challenges for educational programs in communication disorders. Our universities expect us to maintain (or preferably increase) enrollments at the same time that externship opportunities, especially in medical or rehabilitation settings, are becoming more restricted.

A final issue to consider is not only the number of off-campus practicum sites and supervisors, but also the quality of the learning experience they offer to our students. Off-campus supervisors and their administrators must recognize that accepting a student for practicum is indeed a commitment of their time and resources. A student should not be viewed as an unpaid employee whose presence will justify increasing the caseload of the supervising clinician. As universities, we need to clearly communicate our expectations of the affiliating supervisor and identify the responsibilities involved in accepting a student and serving as a clinical educator. We should also help them recognize the benefits of involving students in their programs. If we expect these clinicians to be skilled supervisors, we should provide support to our off-campus clinical educators in their efforts to develop and refine their supervision skills.

### **Management Strategies**

With that brief review of issues that contribute to the challenges associated with off-campus practicums, let us now turn our discussion to strategies we can utilize to minimize the effect of these realities. I will describe practices we employ at the University of New Hampshire in our effort to create and maintain quality off-campus experiences for our students.

#### **Create a Partnership With the Off-Campus Clinical Educators**

It is essential that we create a partnership with our off-campus practicum supervisors. They need to feel their input is welcome and respected. Because off-campus policies and procedures affect them as well as our students, off-campus supervisors should be given an opportunity to discuss these practices.

At UNH, we established the *Off-Campus Supervisors Advisory Council* in 1997. This group meets yearly and average attendance has been 25-30 supervisors. The meeting is multi-purposed. We schedule a formal presentation, with CEUs offered, about some aspect of the supervisory process or a related issue. We also have small and large group discussion about a specific practice

or issue related to the UNH off-campus practicum program. The small group discussions are facilitated by a UNH clinical or academic faculty member. For example, the faculty member teaching the “Motor Speech Disorders” course participates in the Hospital/Rehabilitation setting group.

A typical meeting schedule is as follows:

8:30 – 10:30 Formal presentation – Topics covered have included:

- A Review of Adult Development, Learning Styles and Issues
- Mentoring
- Developing Professional Writing Skills
- An Introduction to the Supervisory Process
- Use of Reflective Journals as a Supervisory Strategy

10:30 – Noon—Large/Small Group discussion – Topics covered have included:

- Clinical Evaluation Form used to assess student performance
- Contract form used by supervisors/students
- Curriculum revisions
- Setting Specific issues (e.g., HCFA regulations re: students)

Noon – 1:00 Lunch/informal meetings

- 1:00 – 3:30 Introduction to the Supervisory Process

This was initially offered at the first of our Advisory Council meetings but it is repeated each year in the afternoon for new supervisors or for those unable to attend in previous years.

Supervisor response and feedback about these meetings has been quite positive. A key to attendance has been offering Continuing Education opportunities. Offering CEUs for a meeting with no registration fee is a good incentive and helps supervisors justify the time away from their position to their own administrators. Because the formal presentation is content specific to the

supervisory process, we feel we are supporting the development of these clinical educators which in turn creates more positive supervisory interactions with our students. Off campus supervisors tell us they appreciate the opportunity to provide input in the development of forms used in the off-campus externship experiences (i.e., the evaluation tool and the contract forms used.)

Of course, a successful partnership cannot be based on one yearly meeting alone. On-going communication with supervisors throughout the year, on-site visits and timely response to their concerns is crucial in building this relationship. Off-campus site visits provide an excellent opportunity to seek feedback about off-campus practices as well as discussion of the affiliating student. Inviting off-campus supervisors to be guest speakers in classes or seminars indicates we value their expertise and contributions to our curriculum.

### **Compensation**

Compensation is an issue that raises many strong and varied opinions. Compensation for supervisors in off-campus settings can take many forms. It may be monetary, tuition waivers, offering free continuing education opportunities, and/or free use of university facilities. In 1999, I presented a Poster session at the *AHSA Convention* reporting results of a survey I conducted on this topic. Let me briefly summarize some key results from that study as it is important for training programs to understand current practices with respect to compensation.

In early 1999, surveys were mailed to 247 educational programs listed in the directory published by the *Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders*. One-hundred and sixty-seven completed questionnaires were received for a 67.6% return.

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Question 1: Does your program offer compensation in any form (monetary or otherwise) to off-campus supervisors of students in your program

	<u>Total</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>Midwest</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>Northeast</u>	<u>Canada</u>
No Compensation	46.1%	52%	44.9%	62.8%	26.3%	20%
Compensation (any form)	53.3%	48%	55.1%	37.2%	73.7%	80%
Monetary Compensation	20.0%	36%	12.2%	7.0%	26.3%	20%

As we can see, slightly over half of the programs responding offer some form of compensation. However, there is considerable variation nationally as nearly three-quarters of programs in the Northeast offer compensation. The programs in Canada were most likely to offer compensation and programs in the South were least likely to compensate their off-campus supervisors in any way.

Monetary compensation was the most common form of recognition offered to off-site supervisors. However, the amount offered was often small with nearly 62% of the programs reporting the figure to be \$100 or less. The highest amount reported was \$500, offered by only 3% of those programs giving monetary compensation. A direct relationship was found between the number of students admitted yearly and the likelihood of offering compensation. Programs admitting 40+ graduate students per year were most likely to compensate supervisors (64.7% offered compensation) while programs admitting 11-20 students yearly were least likely (43.2%) to compensate supervisors. There was no relationship found between geographical proximity of other training programs in Communication Disorders and the likelihood of offering compensation

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Question 2: What types of compensation does your program offer to off-campus supervisors of students in your program?

	Total Return	Programs Offering
Compensation		
No compensation offered	46.1%	N/A

Monetary Compensation	20.4%	38.2%
Tuition Waivers	17.9%	33.7%
Waiver of Registration for CE events	17.4%	29.3%
Use of University Facilities (library, exercise)	16.2%	30.3%
Discount at University Bookstore, sporting events		
	3.4%	6.7%
Other (Luncheon/dinner, adjunct faculty status)	10.2%*	19.1%*

\*The sum of these numbers exceeds 100% because many programs reported use of more than one form of compensation.

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At the University of New Hampshire, we provide compensation in the form of free continuing education opportunities. In addition to the CEUs offered at the Off-campus Supervisors Advisory Council meeting, supervisors who accepted a UNH student during a given academic year receive a waiver of registration to the annual Workshop sponsored by the Department. This event is marketed to all professionals in the area. The conference budget is planned with the knowledge that we may have 30-40 “guests” at the conference and registrations for the paying participants are determined accordingly. This practice has also been very well received and appreciated by our off-campus supervisors. The challenge here is finding a topic that will appeal to supervisors in all settings. Previous topics have included Executive Functions, Counseling Strategies, and Dysphagia. If we do schedule a topic that is more relative to supervisors working with a pediatric population, we then try to balance that the following year with a topic that would be of interest to those practicing in an adult setting. To minimize conference costs, we generally schedule speakers who are with driving distance of our university.

We all recognize that a waiver of a conference registration fee or even a monetary stipend of a few hundred dollars does not reimburse a faculty for all of the hours they spend with our students. It is not meant to. It does, however, send a strong message to the supervisors that their time is valued and

appreciated. Given the shrinking dollars available for staff continuing education support, administrators may be more positive about their staff working with students if compensation in the form of CEUs is offered. Off-campus practicum coordinators should understand national and regional compensation practices when developing their own program's policy about this issue.

### **Maintaining an Adequate Number of Practicum Sites**

Maintaining an adequate number of off-campus practicum opportunities requires a combination of sustaining good relationships with current supervisors and when necessary, identifying new ones. Current sites can be maintained by creating that responsive partnership discussed earlier.

When new sites are needed, the following list of practices may be helpful. These suggestions could help programs identify those practicing clinicians who are interested in supervising a student. The training program could then contact these individuals and determine if the experience they could offer is consistent with University expectations and quality.

- Contacting Former Students
- Solicit Supervisors in State Association Newsletters and at Conferences
- State Association membership form could have an item for members to indicate their interest in supervising students.
- Another option to increase the number of externship sites is to contract with area facilities to offer services provided by a university supervisor and students. This model has advantages in that because the supervisor is from our program, we can be assured that the quality of supervision and clinical services provided meets our standards. Although this is not a practice currently employed at UNH, I know it is used by a number of programs. I hope any participants here using this model will share their thoughts during the information exchange at the end of this session.

## **Quality of Off-Campus Practicum Experiences**

In addition to the number of off-campus practicum sites available, we also must be concerned with the quality of experience they provide our students. Discussion with potential supervisors should cover the nature of their caseloads, the types of service delivery models they employ, their prior experience in supervisory role and their commitment to clinical education. When establishing a new off-campus practicum affiliation, the training program should be clear about the expectations we have of that supervisor. Requirements for the minimum amount of direct observation, meeting time with the supervisee, and associated paperwork should be clearly stated and provided in written form to the on-site supervisor.

The nature and quality of the experience for established sites can be monitored through a variety of ways including:

- Ongoing contact with the student throughout the practicum experience
- On-site visits
- Supervisor evaluations completed by students at completion of the externship experience.

## **Conclusion**

I have summarized some of the practices we employ at the University of New Hampshire in our efforts to manage our off-campus practicum programs. In keeping with the nature of these “How To” sessions, I now welcome comments from participants and discussion of additional strategies you use in your programs to meet the challenge of managing off-campus practicums.

## **References**

Peaper, R. (1999, November). *Compensation for off-campus practicum supervisors: Current practices and opinions*. Poster session presented at the Annual Convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. San Francisco, CA.

## Summary of Participants' Discussion

### Contracting

Participants at these sessions shared experiences with contracting their supervisors and students to provide services at area schools and agencies. The nature of these contacts varied considerably across programs.

#### Positive aspects of this arrangement identified included:

- Offers students varied practicum experiences in settings beyond the on-campus clinical facility.
- Assurance of quality supervision as the supervisor is a university employee.
- Generates revenue, although these arrangements were generally not felt to be great "money-makers."

#### Negative aspects of this arrangement identified:

- Providing coverage when students were away.
- Writing the actual contract to meet specifications determined by university attorneys.

Some programs discussed the problem of the university adding indirect costs on to the contract fee which made it less financially feasible and desirable for the contracting agency.

### Supervisor Evaluations

Participants shared their policies about how they used the evaluations completed by students on the off-campus supervisor. Many programs send the evaluation to the supervisor after evaluations on the student and grades have been received. The problem of especially negative evaluations was discussed. One off-campus practicum coordinator shared her experience with taking such

an evaluation back to the student and asking them to re-write in format that offered ideas about how the experience could be improved rather than just making negative comments.

Other programs reported they did not send supervisor evaluations to their off-campus supervisors. Problems with protecting student confidentiality were generally the reason these evaluations were not shared with off-campus supervisors. One solution offered to protect student confidentiality was not to send the evaluation at the end of each semester, when the affiliating student would be known but instead to hold evaluations for 3-4 semesters and then send as a group.

### **ASHA Resources**

A manual relative to externship experiences is being prepared by ASHA with the collaboration of SID 10 and the ASHA Academic Affairs Office. Expected availability date is Spring, 2002.