# **Introduction to Practicum**

The philosophy of this program is that coursework and practice should be both concurrent and integrally related. Students spend 1-2 semesters (depending on their backgrounds) in practicum sites. Students are placed with selected cooperating professionals from early intervention programs and early childhood special education programs.

**Seminar**

A required practicum seminar, meeting on a regularly scheduled basis, provides students an opportunity to share and analyze their various experiences, as well as to practice new skills and obtain new information. This seminar is required for all students enrolled in a practicum. Practicum seminar includes additional requirements, including salient situations, microteaches, reflections, and a professional development plan. Students must attend each seminar session. If an absence is necessary due to illness or emergency, the student must inform the seminar leader as soon as possible. Additionally, make-up assignments may be required. Chronic absenteeism (more than two seminar sessions) will impact the grade the student received for practicum (i.e., may result in an Unsatisfactory grade).

**Attendance**

The cooperating professionals in the program depend upon the students for assistance with the children’s instructional programs. It is extremely important to the cooperating professional and the families that the student attends regularly and promptly. In addition, the student's attendance pattern is a direct indication of their future potential to fulfill the role of a responsible professional. When a student is unable to come, the cooperating professional should be notified early that morning or the night before if possible.

Regarding holidays and breaks, students should follow the practicum site’s schedule, rather than the university schedule. For example, if a practicum site does not have the week of Thanksgiving off, the student is expected to attend practicum. Similarly, if the site has a different spring break than UIUC, the student should observe the site’s spring break and plan to attend practicum during UIUC’s spring break. If the site does not have spring break (i.e., an early intervention program), the student may take UIUC’s spring break off, as long as the cooperating professional is made aware of this in advance of the break.

Students are permitted two absences due to illness in one semester. The cooperating professional should be informed as soon as possible about an absence. Any additional absences must be made up at the end of the semester, in arrangement with the cooperating professional and university supervisor.

**Hours**

For a four-credit hours practicum, students are expected to spend 20 hours per week in practicum. For a two-credit hours practicum, students are expected to spend 10 hours per week in practicum. These required hours do not include meetings with the university supervisor or travel time to and from the practicum site. Students should attend practicum from the first day of the semester to the last, even if the requisite number of hours have been met. For students in early intervention placements, travel time between home visits may be counted in the required hours.

**Observations**

Practicum students will be observed by their university supervisor 6-8 times in the semester (approximately every other week). Each observation will be 30-60 minutes, depending on the activities observed. Practicum students must submit forms and schedule meetings with the university supervisor before and after each observation. The practicum student should schedule meetings and observations well in advance. If an illness or emergency occurs and an observation or meeting needs to be rescheduled, the student should provide the university supervisor with as much notice as possible.

**Confidentiality**

Educators must adhere to certain ethical standards. Part of the commitment professionals have to their children and families is that they do not disclose information obtained in the course of professional service, unless disclosure serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law. When children, parents, or other individuals are present, practicum students should avoid talking about issues or asking questions until a more appropriate time. The law requires that all information on the children remain confidential. Practicum students should always refrain from discussing children and families with an unauthorized person.

**Dress**

Since the students work with young children and are often sitting on the floor, holding children, painting, etc. they are advised to wear washable clothing that allows them to move freely and yet still maintain an appropriate professional appearance. Students should check with their cooperating professional as to particular dress codes for their site.

**Submission of Forms**

All forms must be submitted to the student’s individual folder on Box, which will be shared with each student at the beginning of the semester. Students are responsible for completing and submitting all forms required, including video permission forms for children who are included on video recordings used in the practicum seminar.

**Timesheets and EI Supervision Verification Form**

Students must complete the *Timesheet* documenting their time spent in practicum. Additionally, students in early intervention placements who plan to apply for the Illinois Developmental Therapist credential should use the *EI Supervision Verification Form* to document direct contact hours with children. Students are responsible for completing the form(s) and obtaining the necessary signatures and submitting them to their university supervisor.

**Evaluation**

Practicum is graded on an S-Satisfactory/U-Unsatisfactory basis. The program coordinator assigns this grade in collaboration with the seminar leader and university supervisor. Students must complete all seminar requirements and successfully complete the requirements on the performance/contract checklist. Students who demonstrate mastery of the practicum competencies will receive a course grade of S. Students who demonstrate behavior which is inconsistent with professional potential will receive a course grade of U.