Practicum Reflection Paper

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HSP 340 Practicum and Seminar

Throughout my experiences of courses taken at Western Washington University, this class has provided me with useful knowledge that will prepare me for my future internships and employment with any organizations or agencies in Bellingham. While most courses provide specific studies of subjects, they have not necessarily applied to real life. In this class we improved our resumes, reflected on our experiences, went through interviews, attended internship and career fairs, and found ways to be involved in the community through our practicum hours.

My original interest of agencies included the Lighthouse Mission, the Agape Home, and Pioneer Human Services. In my Human Services Interpersonal Systems class, we had to conduct a service-learning project throughout the quarter. My partner and I worked with the Lighthouse Mission to coordinate a clothes drive for their homeless shelter. Throughout the project as I learned more about the shelter and the services they provide, I showed more of an interest in interning for their program. Their services provide a drop-in center, an overnight shelter, and a transitional home for women and children at the Agape Home. As a woman, I take more of an interest in working with women and children and helping them specifically with women’s issues and what they go through as homeless mothers. They offer shelter, meals, counseling, and classes to help them get back on their feet and out into the real world. This is a population I would really enjoy working with, especially through an internship while I am in the Human Services program.

Towards the beginning of the quarter, I got in contact with Sean Farnand, the Captain of the Bellingham Fire Department who was looking for an intern in the springtime. He mentioned that they had a current volunteer who was ending their time with the Fire Department and they needed a new person to come help with a new project for the department. I met with him and we discussed what my roles would be as the new intern and how I would be able to participate in both indirect and direct services. In May, Captain Farnand has to present the department budget to the City Council. They need me to input data and help them prepare their budget plan. I will mostly be working with the Community Paramedic, Rob Stevenson and assisting him with the data entry along with the direct service work that he does including rides with the paramedics. The direct service work, although medical work, is in the Human Services field because it is social work too. As the first ones to respond to an emergency, the paramedics are the ones who work hands on with the people out in the community. They make quick decisions on how to improve their patient’s overall physical and mental health given the procedures they are trained to perform. Given the work the paramedics and fire fighters do, they are assisting vulnerable populations whether a medical need or fire emergency, they are in need of help.

My supervisor told me the work would be autonomous and flexible to my schedule. We have figured out a potential schedule for days and times I will come in and work with the Community Paramedic. Hopefully I can attend rides and learn more about their experiences as paramedics working out in the Bellingham district. I am looking forward to more direct service and hands on work. I am hoping these experiences will help me have a better understanding of the department, their goals and missions, and each individual position that is needed to run a Fire Department. I like to believe my goals are similar to the ones mentioned in *The Successful Internship*, “For everyone, though, the internship is a chance to take the next step; to acquire more of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of a profession or an academic discipline and to explore how well they fit with personal interests and strengths.” (Sweitzer & King, 2014). I will be able to use the knowledge and skills I learn in this internship and apply it to future employment positions.

Although I would not have made this decision without taking practicum, my experiences outside of the classroom are what led me to this internship. I have gotten to know Captain Farnand in a professional setting, as I have taught piano to his children throughout my time as a student at Western. Sean already knew that I was a Human Services major and was in need of an internship. Fortunately, given the timing, the Fire Department was in need of a long-term volunteer to help in their department. I spoke with my practicum advisor to see if this was a possibility, my supervisor read through the Human Services Field Manual and found that we were eligible to proceed. Captain Farnand and I met briefly to discuss what my role would be as an intern and we figured out a tentative schedule for next quarter that works for him and the community paramedic. Luckily, this process has been fairly simple and I have been placed in a department I am excited to work in.

My experiences throughout the quarter have been successful and productive. Having a previous connection with my supervisor helped me out tremendously so that I am able to intern with the paramedics. Also, having first aid and CPR training, along with updating our resumes, and learning about legality issues are very useful tools while working in any field. I feel much more confident in my abilities after gaining knowledge and certifications during the course and am as ready as I can be to start this internship.

References

Sweitzer, Frederick H., King, Mary A. (2014). *The successful internship: personal, professional, and civic development in experiential learning*. Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole.