Student Self-Assessment of Field Studies

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HSP 440 Internship & Seminar

My objective to gain skills, knowledge, and experience in law and investigation by efficiently managing time in the office with assigned projects and adjusting to regular procedures covers the process of learning how a Public Defender office runs. There are many complicated affairs within the field of law, Public Defenders, prosecutors, and judges that make huge decisions for our clients, the defendants. Most importantly I wanted to understand and utilize my role as a Human Services professional within the field of criminal justice, and successfully complete assignments that will assist and defend for cases that need social services. As a Human Services professional, social service skills can be highly utilized in the field of criminal justice. It is incredibly important to find the most beneficial way to advocate for our clients and bring a non-legal, critical, and social justice lens to understand the larger system that our clients are entrapped within.

As a student who is actively learning about criminal justice within the classroom and out in the field, I am constantly reflective and critical of situations that arise at the Public Defenders. I am confident that I maintain basic skills and procedures within the office, but am still in a learning status, given the large range of positions, people, and knowledge needed to complete different tasks. I have found a human services position within my role as an investigator for bio socials and as an advocate for at-risk clients with legal financial obligations and other small actions that have become criminalized. I am able to meet with my clients for interviews, intakes, and make necessary phone calls that will benefit their case, meanwhile learning about their legal situation and background. Although I am confident in my abilities to work with clients, I have a lot to learn as new situations and experiences arise in the next few months. As an extended six-month internship, I am progressing to where I need to be, to do my work competently and autonomously.

Many of my learning activities have changed throughout the quarter as I have taken on different cases from my supervisors and attorneys. I have been keeping up with regular procedures such as interviews, intakes, and making necessary phone calls to family members, insurance companies, or businesses regarding our client’s cases. As I have engaged in biosocial cases, by learning an in-depth summary of my clients past, I have been able to use necessary interviewing skills, time management, and developing professional relationships with my clients. Some of the biosocial work involves working with attorneys on some high-profile cases and I have learned strategies to manage those cases along with other small cases. These cases have given me the opportunity to establish connections with the attorneys in the office so they can ask me for help with their caseloads such as small assignments, research, phone calls, and interviews. All of these activities have helped me engage in the process of learning about criminal justice, bringing social justice perspectives, and how to meet the expectations of my supervisor and other experienced employees within the whole structure.

It is especially important, as a social worker that is working with vulnerable, high-risk clients, to understand our client’s background and learn about their life. As an investigative intern with a Human Services background, I can bring a new insight into the situations, especially situations that attorney’s have commonly seen over and over again. As a professional I will really benefit from these experiences that I can carry on into a Human Services profession, especially as challenging situations arise that make me think critically through the whole process. This job challenges me to explore what it means to work within the larger system. Although I have learned theories, pursued research, written papers, and had discussions about criminal justice, there is an incredible amount of learning that experience brings, unlike any class. I have questioned and reflected on all of my learning opportunities at the Public Defender, and it has only made me more curious to learn everything I can in this field to truly bring a critical lens into the work that is done.

One of my goals throughout this quarter was to practice ethics and confidentiality by maintaining a professional relationship with my clients through respect and objectivity through the process. While working on high-profile cases, experiencing frustration, or learning new information it can be incredibly demanding to remain objective and unbiased. This is something I consciously thought about and practiced daily to ensure that my clients were receiving the respect and attention that they need. I am continuously practicing and developing new skills and knowledge to practice cultural competency and ethics in a conscious way. As I am still developing and learning as a professional, it is important to consciously think about situations and efforts that demand critical thought.

Although this internship is still in progress, I am confident in my abilities to learn quickly and adjust to new cases. As a student with field experience, I am at a place where I am confident with my capacity to explore new challenges and go into them in an optimistic, self-reliant state by applying the theories and research I have done as a student to real life situations. At the beginning of the quarter, I was unsure of my abilities to work with the Public Defenders, as I have little knowledge about law and would not be able to offer competent skills in this field. However, I am passionate about working with the Public Defenders and that has made me work hard to become proficient. As I have had different internships over the last year, I have recognized the fields that I do not want to go in. Interning here has been a different experience, and has made me want to work harder as a social justice and human services advocate for criminal justice.

I received a lot of support and supervision from my supervisor, investigators, attorneys, and received help from experienced interns. My supervisor has given me a comfortable amount of guidance and autonomy at the office. Many projects were given to me with confidence that I could complete them with direction to do all of the work myself. I would often go to my supervisor and another investigator for specific questions that I had regarding my assignments, basic office work, and checking in with cases. As I continue my learning journey at the Public Defenders as a professional, I will continue to collaborate and communicate with others in the office to ensure that the work is getting done in an efficient way, and that I am exploring my abilities to work as a professional in the field of criminal justice.