***M.Ed. Counselling***

***Practicum Handbook***

***2023/2024***

The *Council* *on* *Accreditation* *of* *Counsellor* *Education* *Programs* (CACEP) accredits the Master of Education Counselling Program at Acadia University. All courses offered in the program meet the core competency requirements established by CACEP. For a complete description of CACEP program standards and competencies, go to <http://www.ccpa-accp.ca/accreditation/> and <http://www.ccpa-accp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/AccreditationProcedures_en.pdf>

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**Introduction**

This Practicum Handbook provides an overview of the practicum component of the M.Ed. Counselling Program. The Practicum Handbook is a concise and accessible document containing the necessary information pertaining to practicum. This handbook begins with an overview of practicum, the roles and responsibilities of the student and supervisor, and a detailed timeline of the practicum components for both students and site supervisors. The Practicum Handbook includes supporting documents for the practicum process and EDUC 5066: Counselling Practicum & Group Supervision course. All supporting forms can be found on ACORN (students will have access) or on our website at: https://med.acadiau.ca/programs/counselling.html

**Counselling Practicum & Group Supervision (EDUC 5066)**

M.Ed. Counselling students complete their supervised practicum as part of EDUC 5066: Counselling Practicum & Group Supervision. EDUC 5066 is a critical component of the program as students have their first opportunity to apply their skills and knowledge within counselling settings with clients. Throughout the course, students obtain supervised practical experience in individual and group interventions and engage in activities that enhance their personal and professional development. During this course, students also attend a group seminar, where they receive group supervision and provide consultative support to their colleagues within small groups of students led by a faculty supervisor.

**Student Eligibility**

To be eligible for practicum, students must ensure that all foundational counselling courses (i.e., Counselling Theories, Counselling Skills, Group Counselling, Ethics in Counselling Practice, and Counselling Pre-Practicum) are completed.

**Practicum Requirements**

Students must complete a total of 500 hours of supervised practice. Hours must include:

* + 250 hours of direct client contact, which must include a minimum of 170 hours of individual counselling and a minimum of 50 group counselling hours and
  + The remaining hours towards the 500-hour total will comprise indirect client contact.

**Practicum Schedule**

* Part-Time Cohorts are in practicum from September 1 – December 31
* Full-Time Cohorts are in practicum from January 1 – April 30

Students in both cohorts spend 8 hours/day, 5 days/week, Monday–Friday, on-site, unless a part-time practicum has been agreed upon. They attend Counselling Practicum & Group Supervision course (EDUC 5066) on six scheduled Saturdays during practicum. Class schedules are finalized by the faculty that facilitate practicum.

**Placement Policy and Required Documentation**

The Clinical Coordinator assists students in exploring practicum options and navigating the appropriate channels for application. The Clinical Coordinator initiates practicum planning in early fall with students in the full-time cohort (for winter practicum) and early spring with students in the part-time cohort (for practicum in the fall of their third year in the program). At the commencement of these two practicum planning phases [early fall and spring], students will be provided updated versions of the available agency practicum sites/requirements and school practicum requirements.

Once a placement has been verified, students will complete and submit the Practicum Placement Confirmation Form to the Clinical Coordinator as a final step in the practicum approval process. Except under exceptional circumstances, acceptance of an offer of a practicum placement constitutes a commitment to complete one's practicum at that site.

**Required Documentation**

Before the commencement of practicum, and obtained no later than 6 months before the start date of practicum, all students must provide to the Clinical Coordinator original copies of the following:

1. Nova Scotia **Criminal Record Check** and **Vulnerable Sector Check**
2. Nova Scotia **Child Abuse Register Request for Search\*** (This program requirement pertains whether or not the practicum will involve minor clients. Theform is available online at <https://novascotia.ca/coms/families/abuse/documents/CAR-4001_Request_for_Search_Form_A.pdf>).
3. Release of Information for the School of Education

Nova Scotia Health practicum placements also require **documentation of up-to-date immunizations**. Please consult with the Clinical Coordinator for a list of required immunizations.

**All forms must be original and provided to the Clinical Coordinator. No student can commence practicum until these original forms are received. Please give thought to arranging for these forms to arrive within 6 months of the commencement of practicum.**

If a student's Criminal Record Check, Vulnerable Sector Search, and/or Child Abuse Register Search results are positive for history, the student will be asked to meet with an academic advisor to explain the nature of that history. If it is determined that there is a potential risk to children and/or vulnerable adults, the student will not be permitted to register for practicum. Because successful completion of a practicum is a requirement of the M.Ed. Counselling Program, non-eligibility to undertake a practicum will preclude program completion.

**Site Supervision Requirements**

As a practicum requirement, students must receive a minimum of 1 hour of individual, scheduled supervision each week by their site supervisor. These sessions should focus on the goals identified by the student in the **Practicum Agreement** and include various activities, such as case consultations, file review, reviewing of recordings, live supervision, observation, and professional development. In addition to these scheduled supervision sessions, students need regular access to their site supervisors for ad-hoc supervision to answer questions, address concerns, or provide support throughout their practicum.

Site supervisors must have the following qualifications:

1) minimum of a master’s degree in counselling or a related field (e.g., Social Work, Psychology)

2) professional affiliation\* in the form of membership in the CCPA, another recognized professional

counselling association, or a provincial/territorial regulatory college that has:

(a) a shared scope of practice

(b) an ethical commitment to a code of ethics aligned with the CCPA's *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice*; and

(c) a formal complaints procedure accessible to the public.

3) demonstrated competency in a professional counselling capacity for at least four years after

earning a graduate degree in counselling or a related field; and

4) familiarity with Acadia University's Master of Education Counselling Program requirements,   
 performance expectations, and evaluation procedures.

\*For practicums within an RCE or School Board, the site supervisor does not require professional affiliation. The faculty supervisor's professional affiliation can meet this supervision requirement for the student.

**Practicum Evaluation**

Practicum evaluation happens in both formative and summative ways. Students are provided with ongoing feedback (formative) from both the site supervisor and faculty supervisor to support ongoing development. Formative feedback is integral to practicum and supervision throughout the 4-month practicum. Students are permitted to ask questions about their performance throughout practicum and receive honest, fair, and supportive feedback that encourages ongoing personal and professional growth.

Summative feedback occurs through the **Site Supervisor's Mid-Practicum Report** and the **Oral Final Evaluation**. The Site Supervisor’s Mid-Practicum Report consists of an online evaluation form, which will be emailed to the site supervisor prior to the middle of practicum. It is completed by the site supervisor and reviewed with the student before being submitted to the faculty supervisor at the midway point in the practicum. The Oral Final Evaluation, scheduled in the final week of practicum, is attended by the site supervisor, faculty supervisor, another core faculty member, and the student. This assessment allows students to speak to their competency across areas of ethics, emerging personal theory of counselling, skills, strategies, and self-reflection and awareness.

The outcome of the practicum is a Pass or Fail, determined by the faculty supervisor in close consultation with the site supervisor. A Pass indicates solid, competent performance and carries with it the M.Ed. Counselling Program's confidence in the practicum student as a capable, entry-level professional. A Fail means the practicum student may need to undertake another practicum and repeat EDUC 5066 Counselling Practicum & Group Supervision course. This option will apply if it appears likely that additional time in a placement setting will permit the practicum student to develop and demonstrate the required counselling competencies.

The following areas should be considered in evaluating the practicum student's performance:

1) attendance and active participation in counselling and supervision at the practicum site,

2) attendance and active participation in EDUC 5066 Counselling Practicum & Group Supervision course,

3) completed daily log of practicum activities,

4) completed weekly log of practicum activities,

5) submission of three satisfactory examples of de-identified session notes,

6) presentation of a minimum of two recorded sessions, with accompanying case collaboration plan in EDUC 5066,

7) submission of a third recorded session to the course instructor, with an accompanying case collaboration plan,

8) submission of a three-part written Critical Incident Paper,

9) submission of the Student Mid-Practicum Self-Assessment,

10) satisfactory performance and progress documented in the Site Supervisor's Mid-Practicum Report,

11) submission of a written Ethical Dilemma Paper,

12) satisfactory demonstration of the integration of learning in the Oral Final Evaluation,

13) satisfactory performance and progress verified by the site supervisor after the Oral Final Evaluation,

14) submission of the Student Analysis of the Supervisory Relationship, and

15) submission of the M.Ed. Counselling Practicum Placement Record.

**Practicum Agreement**

Upon identifying a suitable practicum placement, the **student will prepare a Practicum Agreement in collaboration with the site supervisor**. This document will outline the goals, objectives, roles, rights, and responsibilities of the practicum student and site supervisor in the practicum setting. Preparation of the agreement should involve a discussion of the supervisory style and expectations of the site supervisor, including specific supervisory activities (e.g., co-counselling, observation, record review, review of audio and/or video recordings) and approaches to assessment, feedback, and evaluation. The practicum agreement should be reviewed, discussed, and signed by the practicum student and site supervisor and then reviewed by the faculty supervisor. Each party keeps a copy of the practicum agreement. **The practicum agreement is submitted to the faculty supervisor by the end of the first full week of practicum.**

**Provision of Tele-Counselling Services**

If students will be involved in providing Tele-Counselling services (i.e., online/virtual counselling or counselling over the phone), site supervisors, in collaboration with the student, must also complete the **Tele-Counselling Checklist**and forward this to the faculty supervisor along with the Practicum Agreement. Students would also need to complete the **Consent for Tele-Counselling Services** form with each client. Tele-counselling hours must be supervised at a ratio of 1:5 (i.e., one hour of supervision must be provided for every five hours of virtual service delivery, which includes phone and video). If this supervision ratio is not possible with the site supervisor, the student and site supervisor must communicate this to the faculty supervisor so alternative arrangements can be made for additional supervision by the faculty supervisor.

**Record-Keeping and Storage**

Counselling session notes are completed after each session in a manner that is acceptable to the practicum site and congruent with the CCPA's *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice*. All client records will be stored securely, consistent with school or agency policies and the CCPA's *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice*. After practicum, session notes and record storage and security become the responsibility of the site supervisor. Students are not permitted to retain counselling records after the conclusion of their practicum.

**Daily Practicum Activity Log and Journal**

Practicum students maintain a daily practicum activity log that will be shared with the site supervisor. Practicum students are also encouraged to keep a practicum journal in which they reflect on their strengths, challenges, growth goals, and learning.

**Weekly Practicum Activity Log**

Practicum students also maintain a counselling activity log that is updated weekly and signed by the site supervisor. The log is reviewed with the site supervisor and submitted weekly to the EDUC 5066 faculty supervisor to ensure that the practicum student is on track for meeting the requirements of 500 hours of practicum (comprising 250 hours of direct contact with individual clients, with a minimum of 50 hours of group work). Electronic self-calculating versions of the activity log sheets will be provided to students.

**Case Collaboration Plan**

Each practicum student will be expected to offer a case collaboration plan during the seminar class accompanied by video-recorded portions of a counselling session. These cases must be presented in a de-identified manner.

**Audio and Video Recording**

The purpose of recording counselling sessions is to promote meaningful and productive self-supervision, site supervision, and campus supervision of practicum student performance and progress. The recording of individual, couple/partner, family, and/or group counselling sessions must be undertaken in a manner consistent with the policies and procedures of the practicum setting (i.e., school board or agency).

Written permission to record sessions must be obtained from clients and/or their parents/guardians per the practicum setting policies and procedures and must be consistent with the informed consent requirements of the CCPA's *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice*. **Audio or video recording of clients may not be conducted without appropriate client and/or parental/guardian informed consent and written permission. Violation of this procedural and ethical requirement will result in immediate termination of the practicum placement. Practicum students should discuss site-appropriate recording procedures with their site supervisor.**

When video recording, the **camera** is **directed at the counsellor only** (practicum student) to help safeguard client confidentiality. Audio and video recordings may be replayed only with permission of the site supervisor or EDUC 5066 faculty instructor/supervisor. Because counselling session recordings might be shared with the seminar class and faculty instructor/supervisor, practicum students must get written permission to acknowledge that the EDUC 5066 class and faculty instructor/supervisor may be listening to and/or viewing the recorded sessions. Audio and video recordings are **deleted,** **erased, or destroyed no later than the last day of the practicum.**

**PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION IS REQUIRED FOR RECORDING OF COUNSELLING SESSIONS WITH ALL STUDENTS REGARDLESS OF AGE AND GRADE.**

**Practicum Student Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities**

Acadia University's Master of Education Counselling students have established a solid didactic and experiential foundation before embarking on their practicum experiences. They have completed the foundational courses in the program and engaged in considerable supervised practice in which they have applied counselling knowledge, skills, and strategies. Consequently, students are deemed prepared to take on a full caseload right from the commencement of their practicum. Because a CACEP-accredited program requires students to log at least 250 hours of direct counselling in a 500-hour practicum, it is **essential that practicum students build up to a full caseload as soon as possible within their placement**.

As a rule, the roles and responsibilities of a practicum student might include the following:

* intakes or initial interviews
* general and/or formal assessment
* four to five individual or couple/partner counselling sessions per day
* three or more group counselling sessions per week (small group, family, class)
* counselling session preparation
* counselling-related reading and research
* consultation with other professionals
* preparation of cases for seminar and supervision
* participation in case conferences, team meetings, staff meetings
* preparing and delivering professional development presentations and workshops
* record-keeping: informed consent forms, consent to audio/video record forms, intake notes, session/progress/process notes, case conference/team meeting notes, consultation notes, intervention/treatment planning, termination summaries
* report writing
* referral letters

Practicum students recognize that they are professional guests at their practicum sites and must always conduct themselves in a professional manner. Practicum students respect and adhere to the policies and procedures of their site. If an ethical conflict arises, practicum students address this immediately with the site supervisor and, if appropriate, with the faculty instructor/supervisor. Practicum students engage respectfully with their site supervisors. If challenges are encountered, the student addresses these directly with the site supervisor and/or faculty instructor/supervisor. Practicum students attend site supervision sessions and EDUC 5066 classes regularly. Practicum students arrive prepared and participate actively to optimize their professional development.

Practicum students have the right to a rewarding practicum experience that offers opportunities to apply counselling knowledge and skills in an environment that fosters a sense of safety and trust. The pace of learning and transfer of responsibility should be tailored to the practicum student, and professional assignments should target the student's 'zone of proximal development,' consistent with a developmental model. Supervisory feedback should be constructive and offered to enhance the practicum student's preparation as an entry-level counselling professional who will engage in counselling practice in a caring, confident, and competent manner.

**Site Supervisor Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities**

1. The role of the site supervisor is to assist in designing and offering an optimal professional development experience that serves as a capstone in the M.Ed. Counselling student's training.
2. The supervisor provides a **minimum of 1-hour** of planned, scheduled, face-to-face, formal weekly supervision. This is in addition to engaging in ad-hoc consultation, team meetings, staff meetings, informal talks, etc., with the practicum student.
3. Practicum site supervisors employ a **combination of supervision methods,** including direct observation, co-counselling, review of audio/video recordings, record-keeping review (content and style), and discussion of counselling issues and client cases.
4. The site supervisor is encouraged to engage the practicum student in a discussion of the supervisor's counselling training and experiences, ongoing professional development, recommended reading, and research interests; explore **legal and ethical** issues as they relate to the work being supervised; and foster reflection on **cultural and other diversity** issues.
5. The site supervisor conducts a mid-practicum evaluation **(primarily formative).** This evaluation entails the completion of the **Site Supervisor's Mid-Assessment Report** and a **meeting with the practicum student to discuss** the student's self-assessment and the site supervisor's assessment.
6. The site supervisor **submits** the **Site Supervisor's Mid-Assessment Report** to the EDUC 5066 instructor through an online survey. This link will be sent to site supervisors prior to the middle of practicum.
7. The site supervisor and practicum student meet for a scheduled debrief during the final days of the placement to review the practicum experience.
8. The site supervisor participates in an **Oral Final Evaluation** **(primarily summative)** with the practicum student, faculty practicum instructor, and a second core counselling faculty practicum instructor. Three competency areas are assessed: Personal Theoretical Orientation, Skill, and Interventions; Counselling Ethics and Legal Issues; and Critical Reflection Skills and Practices. During a 60-minute dialogue, the practicum student responds to a series of questions provided in advance that require them to clearly articulate an understanding and integration of core learning and competencies from the program and practicum experience. The Oral Final Evaluation is scheduled during the final weeks of practicum, at a time convenient to both the student and supervisors. After that, the faculty practicum instructor will provide the student with a summary of the Oral Final Evaluation recommendations.
9. The EDUC 5066 instructor provides orientation, assistance, and consultation to the site supervisor. The frequency and timing of contact between the site supervisor and the faculty instructor/supervisor will be determined mutually. Email, virtual, and telephone contact will be utilized along with **one scheduled site visit** [in person or virtual as permitted]. Additional meetings may be scheduled as warranted.
10. **Site supervisors are strongly encouraged to address any practicum concerns as early as possible so that resolution may be sought.**
11. While it is understood that **most of the practicum students' time will be devoted to direct client contact**, it will be in their professional interests to **learn about and participate in other programs, services, and activities** offered by the school or agency. Initiating and creating learning opportunities in cooperation with site supervisors is invited.
12. Site supervisors are asked to **plan** for the possibility of being **away** from the site for one or more days during the practicum period. Another qualified counsellor (preferably on-site) should be identified who can be an **alternate designated** **supervisor** at these times. The details of this plan should be included in the practicum agreement.

**Timeline & Tasks of Practicum**

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| Task | Description | Timeline |
| Practicum Placement Confirmation | Upon confirmation of a practicum site, the student & site supervisor complete and email to the clinical coordinator | As soon as the site is confirmed |
| Practicum Agreement & Tele-Counselling Checklist (as applicable) | By Friday of the first week of practicum, the student & site supervisor complete, sign, and forward to the faculty supervisor | By the end of the day Friday of the first week of practicum. |
| Consent to audio or video record | Practicum student obtains signed consent from each client and/or parent/guardian, where possible | As soon as possible in the counselling relationship |
| Daily practicum activity log | Practicum student maintains | Reviewed regularly during  site supervision |
| Weekly practicum activity log | Practicum student maintains and submits to EDUC 5066 instructor via ACORN | Reviewed during site supervision; sent weekly to instructor |
| Minimum of 1 hour weekly of planned, formal site supervision | Scheduled by the site supervisor and practicum student | Held at least once weekly |
| Site meeting with EDUC 5066 instructor | Scheduled among practicum student, site supervisor, and instructor | By mid-practicum |
| Three examples of de-identified session notes | Practicum student submits to EDUC 5066 instructor via ACORN | As scheduled by the faculty instructor |
| Minimum of three session recordings | Practicum student presents two during EDUC 5066 class, submits other to EDUC 5066 instructor | As scheduled by the faculty instructor |
| Critical Incident Paper | Practicum student submits to EDUC 5066 instructor via ACORN | As scheduled by the faculty instructor. |
| Student Mid-Practicum Self-Assessment | Practicum student submits to EDUC 5066 instructor via ACORN | By the end of the second month |
| Site Supervisor Mid-Practicum Report | Site supervisor submits through online survey link | By the end of the second month |
| Ethical Dilemma Paper | Practicum student submits to EDUC 5066 instructor via ACORN | At the end of the practicum |
| Oral Final Evaluation | EDUC 5066 instructor schedules assessment exam with the site supervisor, practicum student, and additional core counselling faculty | During the last week of practicum |
| Student Analysis of the Supervisory Relationship | Practicum student submits to EDUC 5066 instructor via ACORN | At the end of the practicum |
| Practicum Placement Record | Practicum student submits to EDUC 5066 instructor & clinical coordinator via email | At the end of the practicum |

To access all practicum paperwork and forms, please refer to either the ACORN site for EDUC 5066 or the following link to our webpage:

<https://med.acadiau.ca/programs/counselling/practicum-information/practicum-documents.html>