



Western Oregon  
UNIVERSITY

Criminal Justice  
Department



## CJ Practicum Essentials

- **Overview**

- The Criminal Justice practicum at WOU requires completing 33 hours of professional experience per university credit (132 hours 4 credits; 264 hours for 8 credits) with a public or nonprofit CJ or social service agency (to be chosen by you in consultation with the WOU CJ practicum coordinator) along with written requirements.

- Volunteer hours can be completed as agreed upon by you, your host agency (field) supervisor and your faculty supervisor. You are responsible for arranging your volunteer schedule and activities with your host agency and notifying your faculty supervisor of your plans.

- **Finding a placement is YOUR responsibility.**

- While the practicum coordinator, office coordinator, and CJ faculty can assist in the process of finding and securing a practicum host agency by suggesting locations based on your interests and directing you to prior host agency supervisors, it is your responsibility to find a location, apply, and secure a placement.

- **Start work to secure your placement NOW.**

- It is imperative that you start taking proactive steps to secure placement at an agency *at least* one year in advance. This is not a mere suggestion! The application process can take anywhere from a couple of months to a year depending on the agency where you apply.
- It is perfectly fine (preferred) to apply and be accepted well in advance of your actual start date. Agencies will typically hold your place until your agreed start date.

- **Every agency is different.**
  - Some agencies may be a bit more informal in their application process and timelines, while others are much more rigid.
  - Some agencies only require a simple application, while others have an application process that is much more complex and robust.
    - For example some police departments in the area require their interns to be part of the cadet program which takes them through an application and training process similar to what's required of new officers.
  - Some agencies have a dedicated practicum/volunteer coordinator and internships are well structured. Others however do not. Both approaches offer advantages and disadvantage.
  - **\*\*\*The key is to do your research well in advance on each agency you are considering.\*\*\***
- **Apply to more than one agency.**
  - It is best to decline if you are accepted at more than one location, than to apply to only one and not be accepted.
- **Consider this the beginning of your life-long career, not just another class!**
  - The agencies where you choose to apply could be the places where you end up working. Or they can also be places that may aid you in some way to get to your 'dream job'. Do not limit yourself in this regard. We have had students as interns in a variety of agencies that are either directly or indirectly connected to criminal justice such as law firms, non-profit organizations, emergency response agencies, local business, boys and girls clubs, police departments, juvenile justice agencies, etc.
- **Face to face communication and interview skills are critical.**
  - Although not every agency conducts formal interviews, be prepared to interview and carry yourself in front of agency personnel. Your practicum

coordinator, and the Service Learning and Career Development Center at WOU can help you prepare.

- **You are representing WOU, the CJ department, and yourself!**
  - You are beginning to build a reputation for yourself in the field. Whether positive or negative, it is likely that this reputation will follow you. This is not atypical of other fields, but criminal justice agencies in particular rely on each other for information on prospects. Carry yourself accordingly and be mindful of what you post on social media.
  
- **This is YOUR practicum, make it count!**
  - The best practicum experiences are those in which students research prospective agencies to ensure they are a good fit, take ownership of their experience, and proactively seek out opportunities to learn and build skills.
  
- **Getting Started**
  - Practicum experiences are typically completed during the junior or senior year of study. The following steps to plan for your practicum should begin at least 3 terms in advance of your desired start date:
    - Submit Practicum Application to CJ main office
    - Learn eligibility requirements and application procedures for potential host agencies
    - Meet with the WOU CJ Practicum Coordinator to discuss your plans
    - When you contact host agency representatives, submit their required application materials and provide them with the “Information for Practicum Host Agencies” sheet provided by the CJ office.
    - Once accepted by a host agency, submit an ADD/DROP form to the CJ main office in room 209 of Maaske Hall in order to officially register for CJ 409.

- Once you have registered for CJ 409, the instructor will request that you provide information about your host agency.
- **Un-Enrolling from CJ 409**
  - If you enroll in CJ 409 but ultimately change your plans or fail to secure a placement agreement with a host agency, it is your responsibility to drop (or un-enroll) from CJ 409 by the applicable course-drop deadline for the term (see the WOU Registrar's Office website for details). As with any other course, you are responsible for course deadlines such as the last day to drop without financial responsibility.
- **Host Agency Requirements**
  - Please note that to be accepted by an agency you may be required to agree to a criminal history check, a review of your social media accounts and/or a background investigation (depending on the agency). During your practicum you will be expected to comply with all rules, regulations and policies applicable to your host agency.
- **Support Throughout Your Practicum**
  - Please keep in mind that if the need arises your faculty supervisor is available to serve as your advocate. We are committed to helping you ensure the best possible practicum experience. Of course, you are your own best advocate, so be sure to approach your field/agency supervisor with requests for specific opportunities or assignments that correspond with your goals. If, at any time, you feel that you are insufficiently challenged (or if you have any other concerns), do not hesitate to contact your faculty supervisor. We will be happy to serve as a "consultant" for purposes of coming up with strategies for you to get the most out of your experience. If necessary, we will also speak with your field supervisor for the purpose of promoting your interests and objectives.
  - Email your faculty supervisor at any time with your questions or concerns. Our objective is for you to have a rich, challenging, and enjoyable practicum experience.