Gerontology Graduate Program
School of Social Work, UMSL

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Practicum Procedures:
A Step-by-Step Guide for Graduate Certificate & MSG Students

This guide is intended to walk the student through the steps and decisions required for a successful practicum experience. Detailed policy statements and requirements are provided in the *Gerontology Bulletin* and the *Gerontology Practicum Handbook*.

Graduate Certificate students are required to take one 200-hour Practicum (GER 6495). Those completing the MSG must take an additional 200-hour Advanced Practicum (GER 6496). The Advanced Practicum is considered a "capstone" experience, usually involving a specific project, product or professional role, and should be completed during the *last semester* before graduation.

Students with a significant work experience in the service of older adults (or in some instances family care experience) may petition for waiver of GER 6495. Such petitions must be made in writing to the Program Director. Those receiving a waiver take a 3-credit elective course in place of 6495.

All students receive detailed advising from the Program Director (or designee) during each semester in the program. Advising sessions include discussion of practicum options and tasks. Students should study this guide and the *Gerontology Practicum Handbook*, and discuss any questions or concerns during regularly scheduled advising sessions.

Students pursuing their MSG on a full-time basis usually complete their practicum experiences during Semesters 2/3 and 4/5 in the program. Those attending on a part-time basis may delay the first practicum until after 9-12 credit hours of coursework have been completed.

SEMESTER 1 in the Program – *Taking Classes / No Practicum*

1	**Declaration of Intent for Practicum** *First few weeks of Semester*	*The student should obtain and complete the Practicum Declaration Form (http://www.umsl.edu/~socialwk/Gerontology/GerontologyIndexPage.html). Turn this form into Debra Garcia, Office Supervisor, in 133 Bellerive Hall.*
2	**Background Check**	*Complete the Worker Registration process through the Family Care Safety Registry, Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services (see http://health.mo.gov/safety/fcsr/index.php). All fees are the responsibility of the student. The student cannot begin accumulating practicum hours until registration is complete. Student status in the registry will be checked on a periodic basis. Instances of background check failure will be managed on a case-by-case basis by the Program Director.*

3	**Notice of Background Check**	*The student must notify Debra Garcia at 314-516-5280 (garciaray@umsl.edu) once the Worker Registration process has been initiated.*
4	**Rank Order Placements**	*The Program Director maintains a list of "preferred" placement sites in the greater St. Louis area (attached). In most cases, the initial practicum (GER 6495) occurs at one of these sites. This list is also used for the advanced practicum (GER 6496), but other sites may be considered for reasons of scheduling and/or to address specific student needs. The student should review the list carefully and rank order the top 3-5 (or suggest a desired alternative or alternatives).*
5	**Meet with Program Director** *Week 6-8 of Semester*	*The student should contact the Program Director to set up a meeting to discuss practicum options by the middle of the current semester (or the semester just before the desired practicum start date). Bring the rank ordered list of sites for discussion.* *A preliminary choice of placement will be made at this time. The student may be cleared at this point to register for the Practicum course in MyView.*
6	**Register on MyView** *Final Weeks of Semester*	*The student should contact the Gerontology Office for clearance to register. This includes obtaining a required permission number. E-mail garciaray@umsl.edu or call 314-516-5280.*
7	**Initial Site Visit** *Final Weeks of Semester*	*The Program Director will make contact with the site supervisor on the student's behalf. If a placement is possible (sometimes a preferred site cannot take a student at particular time), the Director will notify the student, and the student will then schedule a get-to-know-each-other meeting with the supervisor to ensure that there's a "good fit." Consider this as a job interview and behave/dress accordingly! Discuss various learning experiences available at the site and desired working hours.* *Either the supervisor or student may choose not to pursue the placement based on this meeting. In either case, the student should schedule a new meeting with the Program Director to determine next steps. If the placement is not possible for some reason, other options will need to be discussed as soon as possible. It is responsibility of the student to secure an appointment with the Program Director for this purpose.*
8	**Formal Site Visit & Student Learning Agreement** *Final Weeks/Days of Semester*	*Once a "fit" has been established, the Program Director will schedule a formal site visit with the site supervisor and student to discuss the Student Learning Agreement (SLA) form (available on the Gerontology website). The SLA lists seven learning areas in which specific tasks (i.e., what the student will do) and overall objectives (i.e., what the student will learn) can be plugged in. For approval, the SLA must address at least four learning areas with three to five learning tasks in each. Each practicum placement is different, and learning objectives will be negotiated to meet both student and site-related needs. The Program Director will help the student and supervisor determine reasonable learning tasks and objectives during this meeting.*

SEMESTER 2 in the Program – *Classes & Initial Practicum (GER 6495)*

1	**Initiate Practicum**	*Student starts working at the practicum site, participating in any training, checking of background, TB testing, etc., required of employees or volunteers. Hours associated with these tasks may be counted towards the practicum total of 150 hours.* *The student should determine a supervision schedule with the practicum supervisor, ideally meeting 1 hour for every 15 hours worked. Other reasonable supervision plans are usually acceptable. The key is for the student to feel that the supervisor (or qualified designee) is accessible at all times (in person, by phone, via e-mail).* *The student is responsible for tracking and documenting all practicum hours. A form from the purpose may be downloaded from the Gerontology website.*
2	**Finalize Student Learning Agreement**	*During the first 30 hours of the placement, the student and supervisor should meet and work together to finalize the Student Learning Agreement (see Item 8 above). When both are satisfied, they should sign it, and return the original copy to the Gerontology Secretary, 133 Bellerive Hall. The Program Director will then review it, make minor changes in ink (if necessary), and sign it (unless major changes are needed). The Gerontology Secretary will e-mail a PDF copy to all parties, and the original will be retained in the student's file.*
3	**Mid-Experience Feedback**	*When approximately 100 hours have been completed, the student should contact the Program Director with this information so that a mid-practicum check can be made. The Program Director will call or e-mail the Practicum Supervisor. If all is going well, this will be noted and no other action will take place. If there are problems for either the supervisor or student, the Program Director will take appropriate action, likely to include a site visit.*
4	**End of Practicum & Grading**	*Once approximately 185 hours have been completed, the student should present the Practicum Supervisor with a copy of the original SLA and ask that the evaluation fields be completed for each learning area. Ideally, this should take place during a meeting with the student, but can be done separately. This completed form should be faxed to Debra Garcia at 314-516-6416 no later than the last day of scheduled classes for that Semester (Target months - July, November, April). The Program Director will review this form and call the Practicum Supervisor to determine a final letter grade for the student.* **** If 200 hours are not possible within the confines of the Semester schedule, <u>the student must notify the Program Director in writing of his/her intent to complete the experience AFTER the term ends</u>. The student should set a target date, and a delayed grade will be assigned in the interim. The form submission requirements listed above still apply so that a final grade can be assigned.*

SEMESTER 3 in the Program – *Taking Classes / No Practicum*

1	**Declaration of Intent for Practicum** *First few weeks of Semester*	*The student should obtain and complete the Practicum Declaration Form (http://www.umsl.edu/~socialwk/Gerontology/GerontologyIndexPage.html). Turn this form into Debra Garcia in 133 Bellerive Hall.*
2	**Meet with Program Director** *Week 6-8 of Semester*	*The student should contact the Program Director to set up a meeting to discuss practicum options by the middle of the current semester (or the semester just before the desired practicum start date). Bring the rank ordered list of sites for discussion.* *A preliminary choice of placement will be made at this time. The student may be cleared at this point to register for the Practicum course in MyView.*
3	**Register on MyView** *Final Weeks of Semester*	*The student should contact the Gerontology Office for clearance to register. This includes obtaining a required permission number. E-mail garciaray@umsl.edu or call 314-516-5280.*
4	**Initial Site Visit** *Final Weeks of Semester*	*The Program Director will make contact with the site supervisor on the student's behalf. If a placement is possible (sometimes a preferred site cannot take a student at particular time), the Director will notify the student, and the student will then schedule a get-to-know-each-other meeting with the supervisor to ensure that there's a good fit. Consider this as a job interview and behave/dress accordingly! Discuss various learning experiences available at the site and desired working hours.* *Either the supervisor or student may choose not to pursue the placement based on this meeting. In either case, the student should schedule a new meeting with the Program Director to determine next steps. If the placement is not possible for some reason, other options will need to be discussed as soon as possible. It is responsibility of the student to secure an appointment with the Program Director for this purpose.*

SEMESTER 4 in the Program – *Classes & Advanced Practicum (GER 6496)*

1	**Initiate Practicum**	*Student starts working at the practicum site, participating in any training, checking of background, TB testing, etc., required of employees or volunteers. Hours associated with these tasks may be counted towards the practicum total of 200 hours.* *The student should determine a supervision schedule with the practicum supervisor, ideally meeting 1 hour for every 15 hours worked. Other reasonable supervision plans are usually acceptable. The key is for the student to feel that the supervisor (or qualified designee) is accessible at all times (in person, by phone, via e-mail).* *The student is responsible for tracking and documenting all practicum hours. A form from the purpose may be downloaded from the Gerontology website.*

2	**Finalize Student Learning Agreement**	*During the first 30 hours of the placement, the student and supervisor should meet and work together to finalize the Student Learning Agreement (see Item 8 above). When both are satisfied, they should sign it, and return the original copy to Debra Garcia in 133 Bellerive Hall. The Program Director will then review it, make minor changes in ink (if necessary), and sign it (unless major changes are needed). The Gerontology Secretary will e-mail a PDF copy to all parties, and the original will be retained in the student's file.*
3	**Mid-Experience Feedback**	*When approximately 100 hours have been completed, the student should contact the Program Director with this information so that a mid-practicum check can be made. The Program Director will call or e-mail the Practicum Supervisor. If all is going well, this will be noted and no other action will take place. If there are problems for either the supervisor or student, the Program Director will take appropriate action, likely to include a site visit.*
4	**Project Documentation**	*The Advanced Practicum is considered a "capstone" experience. The student is not merely observing or attending meetings, but actually doing work in support of the organization and/or specific clients.* *The student is expected to document what is done during the Advanced Practicum. This can be accomplished in a number of ways:* *- A detailed reflection paper (8-12 pages)* *- A portfolio of work product with a descriptive cover letter or note* *- A research paper* *- A specific written product created for the organization (brochure)* *Exactly what type of documentation is required will depend on the placement and assigned tasks. The Program Director will help decide what documentation will be required. Such documentation must be turned in with the graded SLA (see Item 5 below).*
5	**End of Practicum & Grading**	*Once approximately 185 hours have been completed, the student should present the Practicum Supervisor with a copy of the original SLA and ask that the evaluation fields be completed for each learning area. Ideally, this should take place during a meeting with the student, but can be done separately. This completed form should be faxed to Debra Garcia 314-516-6416 no later than the last day of scheduled classes for that Semester (Target months - July, November, April). The Program Director will review this form and call the Practicum Supervisor to determine a final letter grade for the student.* **** If 200 hours are not possible within the confines of the Semester schedule, the student must notify the Program Director in writing of his/her intent to complete the experience AFTER the term ends. The student should set a target date, and a delayed grade will be assigned in the interim. The form submission requirements listed above still apply so that a final grade can be assigned.*