

Student Mental Health Program

Training and Technical Assistance for California Community Colleges



Highlights from the Field: Developing a Psychological Services Intern Program at Your Community College

Purpose and Background

The link between mental health and academic success has been well established.^{1,2} Yet many California community colleges lack the resources to provide on-campus mental health services, or to meet the increasing demand for these services within their existing budgets. While some

California community colleges have strong systems of community referrals, others struggle to locate and connect with community mental health services that can meet the needs of their students. One promising solution for campuses that face internal or external challenges to meeting student mental health needs is a mental health intern program. Mental health intern programs are a viable and cost-effective strategy, and are increasingly used by community colleges.

Interns often provide case management and referral to local providers, or limited direct services like crisis intervention, group work, and brief therapy. Programs with interns continue to rely upon local service networks, but interns enable campuses to provide more robust direct services on campus. Programs also use interns in order to affect better-managed referrals and a more attentive relationship with students, ultimately resulting in better student wellness and greater academic success.

This profile was developed through interviews with four California community colleges with active mental health intern programs. A fifth interview was conducted with a subject matter expert currently in the process of assisting colleges with developing student intern program protocols. A document review (websites, grantee reports, evaluation surveys, etc.) identified 26 colleges as having intern programs in various stages, including active, inactive, under consideration, or under development. This resulted in a compilation of practices for developing and operating a successful community college mental health intern program staffed by doctoral and post-doctoral candidates, master's level social work students, or pre-licensure marriage and family therapists.

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What Type of Mental Health Interns?

It is common to begin with a single graduate school partner and to build programs to meet the requirements of those partners. There are three types of programs that have clinical requirements as part of their degree granting or licensure standards. Students in these programs may be psychology pre- and post-doctoral candidates, master's level social work students (MSW), and marriage and family therapist interns (MFT).

In general, working with less experienced interns requires a more experienced and readily available supervisor. MFT and first year MSW students may require more intensive supervision and development opportunities than second year MSW and pre or post-doctoral interns.

Deciding which type of intern would best meet your college's needs depends, in part, on:

- Identified student mental health needs and current gaps in service availability
- The availability and type of licensed clinical supervision on campus, including the type of clinical licenses and supervision experience held by current staff, as well as their availability to supervise interns
- Available community referral resources for mental health services that interns are unable to provide
- Appropriate space for individual interviews and/or group sessions

Mental health intern programs that meet national standards and graduate program guidelines are more attractive to graduate programs and students. Other factors to consider include the number and timing of intern positions available through graduate programs, student placement requirements, the training, supervision, and experience students will gain from your program, your program's theoretical orientation and treatment modalities, the intern selection process, and site application procedures.

It is also helpful to have a clear theoretical approach to the services you offer—something that most intern providers will want to know to ensure that your approach aligns with their programs and meets their standards of practice. In the field of social work and psychology, a variety of techniques and approaches exist for prevention, intervention, and treatment therapy and practices. These therapies are evidence-based theories with certain assumptions about human behaviors coupled with the environment in which they occur (e.g., individual, group, community, macro levels).^{3,4,5} For example, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an evidenced-based therapy with research that supports its efficacy for a variety of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and trauma. Often therapies such as CBT are coupled with other options such as art therapy and other creative types of therapy, which are less research-based, but may help patients improve creativity and coping skills.⁶

If a college campus supervises the student, the supervisor and students' theoretical approaches should be complementary. Colleges that offer multiple theoretical approaches to treatment provide an opportunity for student interns who are not firm in

Psychology pre- and post-doctoral (PsyD) candidates require two years (3,000 hours) of supervised professional experience prior to licensure as a psychologist in California. Half of these hours may be completed prior to being awarded a doctorate, but only after advanced coursework has been completed. Pre- and post-doctoral candidates therefore come with more clinical experience and can provide services to students with more complex mental health issues with less intensive supervision. An additional benefit of certification is that post-doctoral interns can also supervise pre-doctoral interns. Internship programs for psychology pre- and post-doctoral candidates must be accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA). The APA has created a toolkit to facilitate institutional and financial support for creating and expanding internship programs. (<http://www.apa.org/education/grad/internship-toolkit.aspx?item=1>)

Masters of Social Work (MSW)/Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) programs generally require the completion of a minimum number of clinical hours as part of their degree or licensure. The internship or field placement is part of the graduate program, so MSW students will be attending classes while participating in their field placement. The number of hours varies by program, but most programs require an onsite licensed clinical social worker to provide supervision. The process for partnering with an MSW program will vary by school, but the application process usually includes a site visit with the program's field placement liaison and attendance at an orientation meeting. MSW field placements last for one academic year and social work interns, unlike most other mental health clinicians, are often trained and expected to provide some case management and referral services as part of their internship. In order to become a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) MSW's are required to complete 104 weeks (3,200 hours) of practicum experience under the supervision of licensed mental health professional, which include marriage and family therapists (MFTs), LCSWs, licensed clinical psychologists, and licensed physicians certified in psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. If the supervisor is an LCSW or MFT, the supervisor must complete a one-time 15-hour course in supervision.

Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) interns are required to seek placements on their own in order to acquire pre-licensure clinical hours. To acquire MFT intern status, graduates of master's level counseling or psychology programs need to apply to the California Board of Behavioral Sciences for MFT intern status. MFT intern supervisors must be licensed mental health clinicians but are not required to be college employees or on campus when interns are providing direct services as long as there is a college employee contact person who will manage placement administrative needs such as interview space, appointment scheduling, professional development activities, and orientation.

their orientation to explore different perspectives or approaches. If an outside agency supports the student interns on your campus (e.g., County Mental or Behavioral Health), the supervision process within that organization will provide a structure to develop and explore their chosen theoretical approaches.⁷

Resources to Further Define a Campus' Theoretical Orientation

To identify practices or approaches for your college, the Jed Foundation's A Guide to Campus Mental Health Action planning outlines a strategic planning process to identify priority problems and set a long-term range of goals to identify evidence-based programs that meet the needs of your campus. (http://www.jedfoundation.org/CampusMHAP_Web_final.pdf)

SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices and the Best Practices Registry (BPR) administered by SPRC and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention list evidence-based mental health and prevention programs that have demonstrated effectiveness. (<http://www.sprc.org/bpr/section-i-evidence-based-programs>) (<http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/>)

Some examples of different approaches used in California community college student intern programs include:

- Fresno City College is designed to prepare interns for a "generalist" professional practice in psychology and ascribes to a Practitioner-Scholar model. The practitioner-scholar model of professional training prepares clinical psychologists to apply knowledge obtained from psychological science to the promotion of mental health and is intended for the welfare of individuals, families, groups, institutions, and society at large. This model of training is recognized by the American Psychological Association as appropriate for the preparation of clinical psychology practitioners.
- LA Harbor supports Existential Humanistic, Systems Theory, Cognitive Behavioral, and Positive Psychology theoretical orientations that promote a formalized educational model, focused on wellness.
- Santa Ana College also advocates a Practitioner-Scholar training model, and trains students in Psychiatric Psychopathology, Object Relations and Self Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Depth, Drama Therapy, Trauma and Mindfulness-based approaches, Affect Regulation, Attachment, and Family Systems theory.
- Santa Rosa Junior College uses an integrative model with a variety of orientations in training with ideas from schools of Psychiatric Psychopathology, Object Relations and Self Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Depth, Drama Therapy, Trauma and Mindfulness-based approaches, Affect Regulation, Attachment, Family Systems theory, and others.

Colleges that have a licensed clinical psychologist on staff often prefer to become a certified placement site by one of several state or national level psychological associations, which require rigorous supervision and training for the student interns they refer. The certification process can be expensive and time consuming, but colleges that have a licensed staff psychologist find certification a worthwhile long-term investment because it attracts more intern candidates and provides an application and initial screening process before referring interns to you for final selection and placement. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs certifies masters and doctoral programs as intern sites. (<http://www.cacrep.org>)

The major associations used by surveyed colleges for doctoral candidates are:

- APPIC - Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers <http://www.appic.org/>
- BAPIC - Bay Area Practicum Information Collaborative <http://www.bapic.info/>
- CAPIC - California Psychology Internship Council www.capic.net
- CCPIC - Central California Psychology Internship Consortium <http://clinicalpsychologystudent.com/reviews/?p=5253>
- PICC - Position In Counseling Centers <http://www2.kumc.edu/people/llong/picc/>

What Services Will Interns Provide?

Using interns effectively requires a clear understanding of what services will be provided by interns, what services will still need to be referred to community mental health providers, and the process through which each will be identified. Depending on the type of interns on your campus, the services they are able to provide will be different. Current interns generally provide these kinds of clinical and non-clinical services on California community college campuses:

Most community college mental health interns provide the following clinical services:

- Intake
- Clinical assessment, diagnosis, and treatment planning
- Individual and couples short-term counseling (6-8 weeks)
- Case management (provided primarily by MSW students)
- Crisis intervention
- Community mental health referrals

Non-clinical services often include:

- Mental health educational presentations for students
- Stress management, coping skills, or psycho-educational groups or workshops
- Support groups
- Outreach and consultation

Services most commonly referred out to community organizations and hotlines:

- Psychiatric and medication evaluations and follow-up
- Psychological testing
- Psychiatric hospitalization or urgent care
- Detox and outpatient drug treatment
- 12-step and other support programs
- Students posing an imminent danger to self and/or others

If your college has a high number of students with unique mental health needs, such as veterans, LGBTQ, immigrant students with limited English proficiency, or trauma survivors, you may want to consider interns who are bilingual or who have more clinical experience with or cultural knowledge of specific student groups at your college.

Common Practices

- College's health or mental health services either contract directly with individual graduate programs who refer and support interns, or have become certified to receive students from a variety of schools through state psychology licensing programs
- Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) and MFT interns are the most common, with a few MSWs and even social work bachelors students (BSW)
- Sites with established programs reported supporting 3-12 interns per year
- All sites examined have 1-3 full-time licensed clinicians who staff their mental health centers and supervise interns
- Stipends of \$1,000-\$4,000 for the year to cover parking and other expenses have been offered
- Internships last from eight months to one year
- Masters and pre-doctoral internships/practicum usually offer approximately 760 program hours, averaging about 20 hours per week
- Post-doctoral interns require 1,500 to 1,720 hours and are usually scheduled to work for 40 hours per week
- Pre-doctoral interns see an average of 8-12 clients per week, depending on their level of experience
- Post-doctoral interns typically see 20-25 clients per week
- Programs typically provide up to 6 hours per week of training and supervision

Administrative Approval and Support

Once you have decided who will provide clinical supervision, the type of interns you prefer, and the services they will provide, you will be able to better strategize how best to obtain approval and support from your college's administration. Here are some strategies for administrative approval and support from colleges with successful mental health intern programs:



- Start small—most colleges initiated pilot programs with minimal start-up costs. If the project was successful, they could consider expansion; if not, few resources were expended.
- Demonstrate how a mental health intern program would benefit the different decision makers you need to win over. For example, having on-campus mental health services or shortening the wait list for mental health counseling can reduce liability risks and lower the risk of suicide, on-campus violence, and incidents that require the presence of local police on campus.
- Describe how a mental health intern program services can address problems that could interfere with student retention and academic performance, and help faculty better understand and more effectively manage their interactions with students with mental health issues.
- Obtain local community referral sources to demonstrate that your program can direct students to services it cannot deliver and that you have the support and collaboration of your referral sources via verbal agreements, designated contacts, and/or written agreements.
- Obtain support from other campus programs and staff who will refer students to your program and can vouch for students' academic engagement and performance improvements after receiving intern or community based mental health services.
- Utilize a campus-based licensed mental health clinician to supervise interns rather than provide direct services—it is more cost-effective since interns can provide more direct service hours than one employee.

- Collect data that demonstrates how your program was cost-effective and contributed to student wellness, retention, and academic success in order to persuade administrators to support program continuation or expansion.

Liability

Find out whether interns can be covered under existing liability, malpractice, and worker compensation insurance on campus, or whether the referring intern program provides coverage. Ideally both your college and the referring intern program provide coverage. Many colleges easily manage this by hiring interns as short-term, non-continuing classified staff.

Space

Be sure that you will be able to provide a private, quiet, and comfortable space for client interviews, student support therapy or psycho-educational groups, and group supervision, especially if you have multiple interns. It is also important to ensure that you can secure that space for the duration of your commitment to your interns.

Supervision

A full time on-campus clinical supervisor provides more consistency and stability for interns and is better equipped to orient them to your campus culture and resources. Colleges that do not have licensed mental health clinicians on staff have either contracted a licensed clinician to provide individual and group supervision on campus, or worked with local community-based intern placement sites willing to outstation their interns to the college for an agreed upon number of hours per week. If onsite supervision is not possible, be sure to orient contract supervisors to your college's culture and relevant campus programs and services.

Screening, Application, and Orientation Processes

When launching programs, coordinators generally start with only 1 or 2 interns. If your interns do not come from a program with an application or screening process, you will need to develop your own screening and selection process. Regardless of how you obtain interns, you will need to develop an on-boarding process that will orient interns to the campus, student mental health needs, the intern program, and local referral agencies.



Policies and Procedures

Before interns arrive, it is important to have policies and procedures in place that address:

- Limits of confidentiality
- Authorization to release information to other college staff and community referral agencies in order to coordinate care
- Secure record keeping and documentation requirements
- How to handle crises and potentially unsafe situations
- Scheduling time off
- Scheduling student appointments
- Client intake, assessment, referral, and discharge
- Intern due process procedures that describe performance evaluation, complaint, appeal, and termination procedures, given to the intern at the beginning of placement
- Data collection
- Quality assurance

Intern Agreement

It is standard practice to have interns sign an agreement that includes:

- Statement that the agreement is mutual, the duration of the agreement, and the terms for altering the agreement
- Intern program responsibilities (minimum hours, supervision, training experiences, client referrals, etc.)
- Site responsibilities (office space, clinical supervisor, legal compliance, etc.)
- Intern personal responsibilities (time off requests, schedule changes, confidentiality, etc.)
- Intern transportation
- Hold harmless agreement
- Insurance coverage for interns
- Intern employee status

In an uncertain budget climate, having a renewable yearly agreement can make it easier for you to make quick adjustments if your funding is decreased.

Program Evaluation

To sustain and expand your program, it is essential to collect data that demonstrates its cost effectiveness in addressing student mental health problems that could interfere with student retention and academic success. Tracking diagnostic and referral information, as well as student service utilization and satisfaction, enables intern programs to identify emerging needs and quality control issues. These data may indicate a need to find additional community referral sources, adjust service delivery methods, or change the skill level of incoming interns and internship learning opportunities. These data also help make the case for ongoing support or program expansion.

Obtaining intern feedback about their experience is also valuable in making program improvements to ensure that the college will be able to continue to attract qualified interns.

Community Collaboration

Some campuses believe that community collaboration is key to being able to sustain and expand the mental health services they provide students via staff and interns. Community collaboration facilitated more user-friendly off-campus referrals for students, who were then more likely to follow-through with referrals received on campus. For students using both community and campus based mental health services, community collaboration enabled all providers to better coordinate care and assist students in navigating different service systems, often leading to better student mental health outcomes.

Colleges that invited community organizations on campus to provide mental health awareness events, life or coping skills workshops, or support groups found that these activities helped lower mental health stigma. This enabled student to build a direct relationship with local organizations, which made some students more comfortable seeking mental health services or encouraging their peers to do so.

An equally important result of collaboration was the support colleges received from their community partners in making their case for expanding their intern programs. Community partners with mental health

prevention and early intervention (PEI) funding also found colleges eager to make PEI programs available to their students, thus assisting community partners with meeting their funding requirements while also providing a valuable service to students. Most colleges noted that initial collaboration success led to developing additional opportunities that continued to benefit students, colleges, community agencies, and local mental health departments.

Replicating Success

The following is a short list of practices from colleges with successful mental health intern programs:

- Make professional development of interns a prime goal of program
- Maintain professionalism in clinic and in relation to interns
- Communicate expectations to interns (e.g. must schedule time off) and sign agreement
- Formalize and routinize program operations
- Have at least 1 full-time clinician on staff; more if possible
- Train interns to provide psycho-educational workshops to student body
- Use interns to enable more onsite services; direct services offered on campus are better utilized by student body than referrals offsite
- Offer stipends whenever possible
- Seek out advanced practicum students to develop program
- Enroll interns as employees to meet liability insurance needs and institutionalize program
- Use post-doctoral interns to supervise and train pre-doctoral interns, or pre-doctoral/master's interns to supervise peer interns
- Maintain a close relationship with local county mental health office, and with other service providers
- Provide Spanish-speaking services

Resources

Several community colleges operate successful intern programs, and many are willing to share copies of their intern agreements, student intake forms, confidentiality and client rights forms, and other documents with colleges interested in starting a mental health intern program.

[Internship Faculty Handbook \(Columbia College\)](#)
[Psychological Intern Program \(Santa Rosa Junior College\)](#)

[Student Psychological Services Internship Application \(Santa Rosa Junior College\)](#)

[An Internship Model: The Life Skills Center \(LA Harbor\)](#)

[MOU to provide mental health services \(Santa Monica College\)](#)

[MOU with CA Child Family Center for Services \(College of the Canyons/Santa Clarita CCD\)](#)

[MOU to provide onsite counseling \(College of the Canyons\)](#)

[MOU Veterans' behavioral health support program \(Orange Coast College\)](#)

[Doctoral Psychology Internship Program \(Santa Ana College\) website](#)

[Pre-Doctoral Psychological Internship \(Fresno City College\) website](#)

These and other resources are available in the CCC Student Mental Health Program searchable database of programs, practices, and policies online at http://cccstudentmentalhealth.org/resources/search_resources.php.

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