Starting Strong in the Field: What New Behavioral Health Scholars Should Know

As you begin your clinical field practicum, it is typical to feel excited and nervous at the same time. We’ve noticed that Scholars who have started strong in the field often do the following...

Jump In

Everyone is nervous in the beginning (yes, even your field instructor!). It can be scary but take a deep breath and jump in. Don’t forget, you are a student who is learning. You are not expected to know everything. It’s always okay to say, “I don’t know, but let me see what I can find out and I will get back with you.”

Seek Opportunities and Feedback

Take every opportunity to learn. It’s up to you – what you put in is what you get out. Don’t wait until your first field evaluation to ask for feedback. Your field instructor will appreciate your openness to learning and working on the things you need to improve. If your Field Instructor says you’re doing “fine” or “good”, you can still ask for specific examples where you could have done better.

Have Realistic Expectations

Many students who have had a positive practicum experience talk about how helpful it is to go into it with an open mind. It may be nice to have a placement where you get to “practice” the specific skills in the particular setting of your dream job, but expanding your experiences, skills, and even learning what you DON’T want to do as a job can be equally as important.

Go with the Flow

You may find that you have a better practicum experience if you can tolerate when your agency changes priorities, or when things don’t go the way you expected. A successful student can learn something from most situations, so think “what can I learn from this experience that I might not have learned if it had not happened?” It may be frustrating or anxiety-inducing at times, but developing the ability to tolerate ambiguity is a very useful skill; it is one that you will find yourself grateful to have at your job, as well as other aspects of your life for years to come.

Ask for Help If Needed

Being able to tactfully raise concerns, advocate for yourself, and constructively problem-solve are also useful professional and life skills. If something doesn’t feel right, please speak up in an appropriate way. Follow the Field Office protocol and also talk with Michelle Levy (mlevy@ku.edu) if you feel that issues impact your Scholars Program participation. Remember we are here to help.