

Six Steps to Intern Supervision

Thinking about becoming a school counseling intern supervisor? Or simply need to brush up on your supervising skills? Follow these six steps to build a great internship experience for both you and your intern.

It was my last year of graduate school and the moment I had been waiting for had finally arrived. I received my internship placement. I was thinking; "Now is my chance to apply the skills that I had learned." Coupled with the excitement of being one step closer to being a school counselor was an overwhelming sense of angst. A series of questions ran through my mind: "Will I meet their expectations?" "What if I can't handle the work?" "Will the students respond to me?" "How strong is my classroom management?" "How do I set up small groups?" "Will I learn everything that I can learn?" "Could I balance my internship and coursework?" "Am I ready?"

A few weeks later, I began my internship. After reviewing the requirements from my professor, meeting with my intern supervisor, going through students' cumulative files and receiving a quick lesson on the data-entry system, I believed I was ready to meet students. I asked my supervisor if I could shadow her for lunch duty. Surprised and excited about my request, she allowed me to meet her students in the cafeteria. We continued our discussion about my university's expectations and my personal goals. Essentially, I was ready for more. That day in the cafeteria provided just the connection I needed.

As I reflect on my internship experience, I recall how overwhelming it was to me. Thirteen years later and several opportunities to supervise interns have shown me that not much has changed.

School counseling interns are a valuable asset to any school setting. It is a rewarding experience for the intern as well as the supervisor. Interns are able to demonstrate the skills they've learned in the classroom with immense energy and keep the supervisor abreast of current information. They have an opportunity to build rapport with staff, students and the community. Interns also have opportunities to network with other school counseling professionals. Likewise, school counseling supervisors are able to share their experience of operating a data-driven school counseling program. In addition, supervising interns prevents seasoned school counselors from becoming complacent in the profession.

There are two particularly fulfilling aspects for me of being a school counselor. The first is that I'm able to have a positive impact on students' lives. Second, I'm able to contribute to future students' success by preparing interns for a career in school counseling.

Using the word INTERN, the following six principles provide practical information and advice for school counselors to use while supervising interns.

- Invest your time
- Negotiate an action plan
- Trust your intern
- Embrace the teachable moments
- Recognize your intern's progress
- Navigate to the next phase

Invest your time

Supervising an intern requires an investment of your time. An organized, balanced work schedule benefits both you and your intern. While preparing for your intern's arrival, review your work schedule and seek opportunities for the intern to be involved as well. Consider these five best practices to

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How Do I Get an Intern?

If your school counseling department doesn't already provide an opportunity for school counseling students to intern at your school, consider adding this component to your program. Follow these steps to setting up a school counseling intern program:

- Discuss the idea with the other school counselors in your school and gauge their interest and willingness to get involved.
- Get buy-in/permission from your principal. Share your plans for what the intern would do and how it would help the school counseling program and the school as a whole.
- Investigate any school and/or district guidelines about bringing in interns.
- Discuss your ideas with the district-level school counseling coordinator and get buy-in. Find out if there are other schools in your district already working with school counseling interns and meet with them to learn more about their experiences, advice and potential pitfalls.
- Talk with local university professors if you get the green light to begin working with interns. Share with

investing your time:

1. Examine your school's data and determine some areas that may require your intern's assistance. Such data may include student achievement (e.g. grades, standardized test scores, enrollment in rigorous courses and special programs), attendance and even discipline. Pay attention to the sub groups as you're examining your data. While you're planning, consult with your colleagues and administrators.
2. Make space for your intern. Provide a desk or an office, and give your intern a space to store personal belongings. Make arrangements with your technology specialist if your intern is able to have computer access.
3. Connect with your intern before the intern's first day. A face-to-face conversation is most helpful. During my recent supervision experience with Johns Hopkins University, we began our relationship with a face-to-face meeting that included my intern, the university professor, the school supervisor and the director of student services. This meeting served as a forum to discuss the expectations among all parties. I also provided a tour of the school building and used this as an opportunity to discuss our students' needs.
4. Formally introduce your intern to the staff at a meeting or via e-mail. I've also introduced my intern in our school counseling newsletter.
5. Dedicate time to providing feedback through weekly supervision and evaluation meetings. You may also need to invest your time in communicating with the university.

Supervising an intern involves extensive planning and frequent monitoring, but it will contribute to a more meaningful experience if you devote the proper amount of time.

Negotiate an Action Plan

Before you can negotiate an action plan, allow your intern to shadow you for a few days. If you have other school counselors on staff, have your intern shadow them as well. Provide your intern information about your school and any counseling resources you may have. This can be an exhausting encounter for interns; be sure to check how they're holding up.

Once your intern has been acclimated into the building and begun establishing a rapport with students and staff, it is time to negotiate an action plan. Create a weekly schedule for supervision. To minimize distractions, this meeting is most effective when it is away from your office. Devote at least one hour per week to supervision. You can schedule a one-hour meeting or two half-hour sessions. Be intentional about scheduling your meeting by placing it on your calendar.

Negotiating an action plan involves three components: the university's requirements, the school's needs and the intern's personal aspirations. Help your intern develop goals for the internship experience. Part of this action plan may involve other staff members. Even though your intern's action plan includes regularly scheduled meetings, make certain you're available to answer questions that may arise prior to the weekly meetings.

Trust Your Intern

Your intern's experience progresses from: shadowing and building rapport, assisting with classroom lessons, supporting small groups and participating in various indirect student services. As a supervisor, your role transitions from being a coach to a consultant. In the beginning, you and your intern will work shoulder-to-shoulder until the intern is comfortable completing tasks independently. When this time arrives, you will have to relinquish control and trust your intern. In developing this trust, it is important for you to be aware of your own counseling style and approach to handling situations. Your intern may have a different style and approach. Will you trust your intern to fulfill the task?

Be encouraging throughout the process. One of the most enlightening experiences I've had as an intern supervisor took place last school year. I attended an intern supervisors workshop, where I was encouraged to examine my management style and realized it was different from my intern's. When someone shares an idea, my response is likely to be "Great, let's do it." My intern, however, was more comfortable with a slower, more thorough pace to planning. Understanding this difference was

the professors the goals of your comprehensive school counseling program, information about your school, what type of experiences the intern would gain and the intern's expected duties.

extremely useful to both of us.

A different approach does not necessarily mean it's an incorrect approach. Trust your intern and encourage him or her to strive for excellence.

Embrace the Teachable Moments

I recall having a conversation with one of my interns a few years ago. We were heading to a classroom where I was scheduled to conduct a lesson. I was thinking that it may be a good opportunity for my intern to take a leadership role during the lesson. I asked the question, "Are you ready?" The answer was, "Not yet."

One of the magnificent aspects of being a school counselor is the spontaneity. At times, it is the on-demand, spontaneous opportunities that provide the best experience rather than those from a scheduled activity. Many teachable moments occur in a typical day for a school counselor. For example, a crying student may come into your office. A new student may need to register. A teacher may be desperate for an intervention. A parent may stop by unexpectedly. An administrator may call you into a meeting.

If you encounter an on-demand situation that could be a teachable moment for your intern, ask the student, parent, teacher or administrator if he or she would be comfortable having your intern present. Some of the most notable moments I've witnessed took place when I've been dealing with a situation and the intern not only observed but assisted as well.

Allow time for your intern to embrace the teachable moments. Present your intern with this opportunity, but be close enough to lend support when needed.

Recognize Your Intern's Progress

Before too long, you and your intern have hopefully settled into a routine, and you're having weekly observation meetings. During these meetings, take some time to review your intern's weekly log, and be prepared to answer any questions. Also discuss any progress your intern has made toward fulfilling his or her goals.

Interns are often concerned about whether or not they're making adequate progress. They will appreciate honest and frequent feedback. This is a prime opportunity to recognize any accomplishments you've witnessed. Conversely, if you see some areas requiring improvement, discuss those as well. In addition to the weekly supervision meetings, feel free to leave a positive note, send an e-mail or just say, "You're doing a great job."

As they get more experience and become more comfortable at your school, interns often become extremely busy meeting with students and working on special projects. While you're recognizing their successes, be sure to encourage them to have a balanced schedule. Interns aim to please, but we would not want a novice school counselor experiencing burnout. Pacing is critical.

Navigate to the Next Phase

As you near the end of the intern supervision cycle, you may wonder what's next. Your intern is most likely preparing for graduation and seeking employment. As a supervisor, you can guide interns through this process. As they look for a job, be willing to review their resume, offer interview tips and provide a recommendation letter. As previously mentioned, supervising requires an investment of time, but that additional time is advantageous if it means you're preparing a school counselor to effectively serve students and their families.

School counselors who supervise interns play a valuable role in providing assistance for school counseling students. Interns need our support, direction and an opportunity to test drive what they learned. As a school counselor, you are more than equipped for such a task. Interns need school counselors to be available, understanding, compassionate and patient. If we invest our time,

negotiate an action plan, trust them to complete their task, embrace the teachable moments, recognize their progress and navigate them toward the next phase, we can ensure our interns will be prepared to be successful school counselors. I can't think of a better way to contribute to the profession.

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