

PUBLIC JUSTICE PRACTICUM (PBJ 397)

The Public Justice Practicum course gives students a valuable opportunity to gain practical experience in an occupation of interest, to make professional contacts, and to prepare for their future careers.

Every student who graduates with a degree in Public Justice from SUNY Oswego must complete at least one supervised fieldwork experience. The practicum course required of all Public Justice majors is PBJ 397. This course may be taken for three (3) or six (6) credits. Students take PBJ 397 during fall and spring semesters, as well as during summer sessions.

Students generally take PBJ 397 as second-semester juniors or first-semester seniors. At this point, they have completed most of the academic work for their degree and are looking to do two things: 1) observe and gain practical experience in an occupation in which they hope to find a job; and 2) recognize and discuss what theories relating to Public Justice are at work in the “real world” and how they apply in the day-to-day activity in a Public Justice agency. In this sense, PBJ 397 serves both an academic and a professional purpose for Public Justice students.

If a Public Justice student approaches you looking for a fieldwork placement, we encourage you to treat the student like a prospective job applicant (provision of a resume, interview, etc.). The Public Justice Department will be happy to provide a letter confirming the student’s registration in PBJ 397 at your request.

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Nature and Purpose of Practicum Course

The principal purpose of the Public Justice practicum course is to provide an opportunity for students to relate theory they have learned in their course work to the way things “really work” in the field. PBJ 397 may be taken for 3 or 6 semester hours of credit, depending on the student’s interests and the demands of particular placements. A student must work forty hours in his or her agency for each credit earned. In addition, students must write reports and meet with the course instructor (both in class and individually) to discuss the fieldwork experience and relate it to the students’ studies. **Please Note:** PBJ 397 is not an internship. It is a course with a required fieldwork component. Class meetings and academic research and paper writing are an integral part of PBJ 397.

Each practicum student must also write a paper relating theory to practice within the context of his or her fieldwork placement. Students taking PBJ 397 for 6 semester hours are required to complete an additional academic project to be determined by the instructor, such as a more detailed theory and practice paper, a second paper, or a demonstration project.

Insurance/Liability Issues

The Public Justice Department no longer carries an internship liability policy. Upon request, the department will provide a Waiver of Liability form for the student to complete. In addition, again upon request, the Vice President for Administration at SUNY Oswego will provide a letter to your agency explaining the College’s self-insured status as an agency of the State of New York.

Confidentiality

All Public Justice students are told specifically and in detail that operations of agencies in which they will do fieldwork are confidential. In addition, all PBJ 397 students are given and sign a Fieldwork Contract that details their obligation to maintain the confidentiality of the agency with which they are associated. Nevertheless, we urge you to have a discussion with any new intern in which you provide details of the scope and nature of confidentiality in your agency and specific information about the “do’s and don’ts” of maintaining confidentiality.

Fieldwork Supervisor’s Responsibilities

PBJ 397, like all internships and practica, is primarily a self-directed learning experience. Students determine what career area they want to explore, identify and contact appropriate agencies to set up their fieldwork placement, and work with their instructor and fieldwork supervisor to determine their learning objectives and appropriate fieldwork activities.

As a fieldwork supervisor for PBJ 397, you are expected to do the following:

1. Provide the opportunity for the student to complete 120 (3 credits) or 240 (6 credits) hours of supervised fieldwork in your agency or office.
2. Identify specific activities for the student to perform during the fieldwork placement, according to the student’s interests and abilities. These may consist of both observation and hands-on activities, depending on the nature of your agency and your assessment of the student’s ability, preparation, and level of maturity. While it may be necessary that some of the student’s time be spent in clerical activities, e.g., answering phones, typing, filing, it is important that the majority of his/her time be spent in observing and/or performing the substantive duties of the position he/she is learning about.

3. Supervise the daily activities of the student in his/her fieldwork placement, or assign day-to-day supervision of the student to other employees and monitor the progress of the fieldwork placement.
4. Complete and return to the Public Justice Department an evaluation of the student's performance during his/her time in your agency. A departmental evaluation form is provided for your convenience. The form asks you to address the student's performance in terms of the academic preparation the student brought to the fieldwork, the "job-readiness" skills the student displayed while employed in your agency, and the student's performance of the tasks/activities to which he/she was assigned while under your supervision. Some instructors request two performance evaluations: one at the mid-point of the student's fieldwork and another at the end.

If there are particular areas in which you feel that a student was deficient, either in terms of academic preparation or job-readiness skills, we would like to know about it so that we can make adjustments in our program and how we prepare students for their practicum course. Naturally, if you find the student particularly well-prepared, we would like to hear about that, too!

Term Paper

All PBJ 397 students write a term paper comparing theory and practice (15-25 pages) as part of the requirements of the course. These papers are not intended to be critiques of the agency in which the student is working, nor of the activities of the agency's employees; however, the student is encouraged to maintain a critical attitude about both the theories that underlie the activities of agencies in the public justice system and the way those theories are applied in the day-to-day work of such agencies. In order to avoid inhibiting the student in completing the academic component of his/her course, we ask that you not require the student to share his/her term paper with you.

Evaluation by Fieldwork Supervisor

An important component of the final grade in PBJ 397 is the evaluation of the student's performance by the fieldwork supervisor.

The Practicum course instructor will solicit this evaluation from the fieldwork supervisor. Most students receive excellent evaluations and often use their fieldwork supervisors as job references. Occasionally, students perform so impressively that they are subsequently hired by their practicum fieldwork agency!

We treat supervisor evaluations as if they were confidential references. However, if you wish to share the contents of your evaluation with the student, please feel free to do so.

Any student who is assigned a grade of "E" on his or her fieldwork evaluation will receive an "E" in PBJ 397, no matter how well the student performs in other areas covered by the course.

A student may be assigned an "E" grade on the fieldwork evaluation only when the fieldwork supervisor reports serious acts by the student involving the student's responsibility, reliability, and/or honesty, including, but not limited to:

- a. actions which tend to breach the required confidentiality of an office or agency;
- b. illegal or improper conduct by the student under color of working for the agency;
- c. repeated lateness for work;
- d. repeated unexcused failure to attend scheduled work hours;
- e. repeated unexcused failure to perform or complete work or duties assigned by the supervisor;
- f. repeated failure to follow supervisor's directions.

If a fieldwork supervisor requests the removal of a student as a result of irresponsible or improper behavior, and if, after investigation, that student is subsequently removed from the fieldwork placement, such removal shall also result in a grade of "E" for PBJ 397

In the case of serious misconduct by a student in a fieldwork placement, which causes that student to be assigned an "E" in PBJ 397 the Public Justice Department, upon consideration of all the circumstances, may refuse to permit the student to repeat PBJ 397.

The Public Justice Practicum



An Informational Brochure for Fieldwork Supervisors