



The Role of Supervision in Field Education Programs
Youth Ministry Department
Eastern University, 1300 Eagle Rd, St Davids, PA 19087

...The whole gospel for the whole world

One of the most important tasks of a good supervisor is to help the student intern reflect critically on his or her ministry. Through this reflection, the student is helped to grow in self-awareness, professional skills and theological meanings.

More than anything else, the relationship between the supervisor and the student is important *because it is the main method through which learning takes place*. It's a relationship that presupposes an openness and a willingness to communicate by the intern as well as the supervisor.

It is through this relationship that the student is helped to reflect on his/her ministry. Supervisor and intern walk through the internship together. The supervisor supports the student during periods of discouragement, encourages free expression of feelings without fear of reprisal and stimulates further efforts at learning through the supervisor's interest and recognition of what he/she does well.

The relationship should be sustained by both formal, i.e. regularly scheduled, conferences and informal encounters.

The supervisor has several functions to fulfill in the areas of administering, evaluating, teaching and consulting:

- The **administrative function** involves *general overseeing* of the student's work. The supervisor *suggests specific tasks* for the student. The supervisor should help the student's development of ministerial skills.
- The **evaluation process** helps the student recognize strengths and weaknesses, failures and successes and thus improve effectiveness in ministry in the future. The supervisor should also elicit response and criticism from the other members of the staff.
- The **teaching function** of the supervisor includes the *direct transmission of knowledge and information*, which represents new content for the student. He/she should also be open to suggestions and insights of the student.
- The **role of consultant** is perhaps the *most important* of these various functions of the supervisor. In a non-directive way, he/she helps the student to reflect on ministry in light of feelings, theology and spirituality. As a consultant, however, *the supervisor should also feel it is appropriate to challenge assumptions and ideas* so that the student is forced to think through various questions that might come up.

The supervisor moves with caution, introducing the problems when it appears wise and necessary to do so, and then proceeding with warmth, but with firmness. *Although it will never be easy for a supervisor to point out problems during the internship, concern for the student's development should outweigh his/her discomfort.*

The formal written evaluations made during the internship are very important to the program. It is, in truth, only a summing up of all that should have gone before. Ideally, there should be no surprises from the supervisor for the student in the final evaluation.

Finally, **students have a responsibility for their own learning** and though we assist them, we enable them to grow by helping them to understand their progress at each step of the way.

Often, Field Placement Supervisors ask us, “**What are your expectations for me in my role as Supervisor?**” This document is an attempt to answer that question.

SUPERVISION: THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE CONTEXTUAL EDUCATION

Elements of a Supervisory Relationship

It is obvious that supervision is a delicate art that not only requires a special understanding of the dynamics of human relationships, but also demands studied attention to the task of giving individual professional guidance. Some characteristics of effective supervision include:

- The interrelationship between the student and supervisor should be *emotionally significant*. Does that mean we expect you to be “best friends”, “Father-Daughter”, soul mates? No. Does it mean that we hope the relationship will go beyond the bare bones employer-employee relationship? Yes. Ideally, this relationship would be, at its very minimum, a good positive relationship.
- The supervisor is expected to *make demands* on the student, which are productive towards growth. Do not be afraid to hold your student accountable for spiritual and professional growth.
- The supervisor is also expected to be supportive of the student since *this is a growth experience in which mistakes are a presupposition*. If the student already knew how to do this work, with flawless execution, there would be no reason to be in school and no reason for the internship.

Our assumption is that the Supervisor is a teach/mentor who understands that mistakes and risk are part of the learning process. And that sometimes, the lessons learned best are the lessons learned by mistake.

The supervisory relationship has several characteristics, which makes it distinct from most other relationships:

- It is a programmed relationship with ***specific goal and expectations***. In that sense, it is a relationship between friends, but we hope that it will be more than a friendship.
- The *goals and expectations of the relationship are **clearly defined and accepted*** prior to the establishment of the relationship. See the enclosed syllabus in which the students contract for a particular grade.
- It is a relationship in which one party has an ***acknowledged authority*** over the other.
- There is a definite ***task responsibility*** on the part of both the parties involved in the relationship.
- There is a definite ***time span*** built into the relationship.
- There is a ***specific setting*** in which the relationship is developed.
- There is a conscious ***continuing evaluation*** on the part of both the parties throughout the duration of the relationship.

Supervision is working with a student who is working with parishioners—not working with parishioners through a student!

Techniques of Supervision

- **The housekeeping session.** Concerned with passing along needed information about schedule changes, activities, assignment. Some quick decision-making may be involved.
- **The individual supervision conference.** Initiative for selecting subjects for discussion remains largely with the student, through the focus is on matters that would help the student identify with the pastoral role.
- **The evaluation conference.** A session held periodically during which time the student is given some clear “bottom line” assessment of how his/her ministry and growth is being perceived by the supervisor.
- **The seminar** (with a focused agenda) for *use with more than one student*. Group meeting in which the subject is some pastoral problem with an agenda of clinical review and discussion. It may be in the form of a case study, a verbatim review, a film, etc.
- **The personal concerns hour** (without pre-set agenda) for use with more than one student. Any matter of concern may be raised. Supervisor attempts to listen with a “third ear”- to gain clues to “What causes you to raise that question with the group now?”

Tools of Supervision

A structured approach is necessary for the growth process and integration to take place. Regularly scheduled meetings are expected. Minimum expectations:

- 1_ hours semi-weekly. These meetings should be scheduled in advance and given no less priority than other set appointments. In addition, there may be informal sessions and emergency or need-based meetings as opportunities arise. Agenda for sessions:
 - ⊕ It is suggested that both the supervisor and student have input to the agenda.
 - ⊕ The focus of the agenda should be on learning, not negative criticizing.
- Suggested techniques for reporting.
 - ⊕ Journal/ diary/ or day-book
 - ⊕ Verbatim reporting
 - ⊕ Case report or critical incident report
 - ⊕ Non-written tools: Conversational reporting, audio tapes, videotapes
- Uses of reporting:
 - ⊕ Get at the facts by eliciting more information not contained in the shared Performance Evaluation Reports.
 - ⊕ Get at the feelings of all people involved.
 - ⊕ Integration of facts and feelings within the students.
 - ⊕ Yielding further responses about other appropriate or alternative actions.
 - ⊕ Yielding insights from the perspective of faith.

Questions Appropriate to Supervision

The issues involved in supervision can be expressed in a number of questions that are useful in working with the student intern. We offer them here, not as some sort of formal agenda or interrogation process, but rather as suggestive of the kind of subjects appropriate to the intern process. To some extent, the questions, as they are listed below, provide a glimpse into the process of working through any critical incident the student encounters in the placement setting.

What took place? In what way did you respond to the event? How do you feel about what happened? How do you interpret the experience? What can be learned from the incident? How can the continuing situation best be confronted or handled?

The regular conference between student and supervisor is the heart of Field Education. It is here that field work becomes Field Education. Within this extended conversation, supervisor and student hold up to the light pieces of behavior, moments in ministry by the student, and gently but steadily turn the experience so that the following can be examined:

- **Professional Skills:** These are the how-to issues. Here the concern is on the behavior itself. Was the lesson read so that it could be heard? Was it correctly introduced? Or, in a teaching situation, what led to the problem of discipline? Was there an adequate lesson plan? Were the group/s needs being met? How did you handle an unruly student in the meeting?, etc.
- **Professional Identity:** Who am I? Here the concern is more *feeling-oriented*. Each student must not only learn to do things, but must begin to feel some security in the performance of his duties.
- **Vocation:** The concern is that deep question, “Is this for me?” Do I truly feel called to serve God as a full-time youth worker?
- **Theological Reflection:** As the experience is viewed, one facet is the question, “Where is God in all of this?” To be able to help a student see the theological dimension of an ordinary ministry situation is an exciting moment of learning.

To maximize the benefit of these regular conferences between student intern and supervisor there are certain elements that should be considered essential.

- Rapport and trust between supervisor and student is fundamental. This does not occur overnight. Factors which lead to rapport and trust include clarity of expectations, mutual respect, positive strokes genuinely given and genuinely received, sensitivity to feelings, responsibility in performance of duties, being on time and well prepared for supervision, and open and honest expression between both parties.
- Regularly scheduled supervisory conferences are essential. The time together should be relatively free of interruption. An hour and a half is about all the time which can be spent together helpfully.
- An agenda, usually brought in by the student, is necessary. That is, every conference is to look at some ministry situation. The student brings an account of something s/he has been involved in. At some conferences, the supervisor will bring the agenda. This may include feedback he has received about aspects of the student’s work, or it may be related to lessons the supervisor himself or herself has learned.
- The analysis of the behavior, the experience, takes place at several levels:
 - ⊕ **Facts:** Check for facts that clarify the event in your mind.
 - ⊕ **Feelings:** Be aware of the student’s feelings--as well as your own.
 - ⊕ **Focus:** Focus on the primary issue--the basic decision to be made. Do not solve the problem for the student.
 - ⊕ **Future:** What are the next steps?

FIRST YEAR AGENDA FOR FIELD PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR / STUDENT MEETINGS

This is not intended as a hard-core agenda that must be carried out in the case of each Field Placement student. The intention is to: (1) Reaffirm our desire that there be a semi-weekly meeting between supervisor and student that will involve more than strict “nuts and bolts” planning conversation; (2) Give supervisors an idea of what kinds of discussions the student will be involved in during their semi-weekly group meetings with YMIN Department faculty on campus. Hopefully, as we correlate the on-site reflection meetings with the on-campus group reflections meetings, students will be better able to benefit from the Field Placement experience.

Meeting with Supervisor	Week #	On-Campus Field Placement Reflection Group
<i>FIRST SEMESTER</i>		
Discuss student’s role in church of agency; vision and mission of the church or agency.	1	Go over syllabus and course expectations.
Students philosophy of youth ministry; Plan a strategy for ministry in this setting.	2	Helps students consider what needs to be done; identify goals for placement; develop action plan.
Work through Performance Evaluation #1 together.	3	Begin presenting case studies and using them as fodder for group discussion.
Evaluate current youth ministry program using pyramid and funnel configuration students have learned in YMN classes at Eastern.	4	Discuss how different youth ministries are overdeveloped or underdeveloped; observations based on funnel/ pyramid evaluation.
Begin thinking ahead about next semester. Should there be changes or shifts in responsibilities.	5	Discuss case studies presented in class by other field placement students.
Work through Performance Evaluation #2 together.	6	Evaluate together, what we’ve learned, how we’ve grown; feedback on placement experience.
<i>SECOND SEMESTER</i>		
Review objectives from Fall; discuss short-term goals for this semester.	7	Discuss case studies presented in class by other field placement students.
Work through Performance Evaluation #3.	8	Discuss case studies presented in class by other field placement students.
Reflect on main lessons learned through year of placement.	9	Discuss main ministry-related lessons learned during year of placement.
Final assessment of objectives; specific plans for summer or next school year. Should this placement continue?	10	How have you grown spiritually through your placement experience this year?
Work through Performance Evaluation #4 together.	11	Final evaluation, sharing feedback on placement program.

SECOND YEAR AGENDA FOR FIELD PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR / STUDENT MEETINGS

Meeting with Supervisor	Week #	On-Campus Field Placement Reflection Group
<i>FIRST SEMESTER</i>		
Discuss student's learning goals for this year. What do they need to learn to round out their learning experience before they jump into ministry full-time?	1	Go over syllabus and course expectations.
Student conduct interview of Supervisor; how was their sense of call shaped? How did they prepare for ministry? What were some of the biggest obstacles they faced or lessons they learned?	2	Helps students consider what needs to be done; identify goals for placement; develop action plan.
Work through Performance Evaluation #1 together.	3	Begin presenting case studies and using them as fodder for group discussions.
Team Ministry. How do we develop a ministry team? What have been the challenges and successes of developing volunteers in the youth program?	4	Team Ministry issues. What have been the lessons learned through trying to recruit and nurture a volunteer team?
Begin thinking ahead about next semester. Should there be changes or shifts in responsibilities?	5	Discuss case studies presented in class by other field placement students.
Work through Performance Evaluation #2 together.	6	Evaluate together, what we've learned, how we've grown; feedback on placement experience.
<i>SECOND SEMESTER</i>		
Review objectives from Fall; discuss short-term goals for this semester.	7	Discuss case studies presented in class by other field placement students.
Work through Performance Evaluation #3 together.	8	Discuss case studies presented in class by other field placement students.
Reflect on main lessons learned through year of placement. How would supervisor advise in terms of additional areas that need work?	9	Discuss main ministry-related lessons learned during year of placement.
Final assessment of objectives; specific plans for next step (seminary, full-time ministry, etc.)	10	How have you grown spiritually through your placement experience this year?
Work through Performance Evaluation #4 together.	11	Final evaluation, sharing feedback on placement program.