

Tips for a Successful Field Experience in the CABH Master's Program

Congratulations on beginning your CABH Field Experience! This is a critical part of your professional development and a valuable conclusion to the CABH program. Your field experience provides an opportunity for you to gain hands-on experience in the field of child and adolescent behavioral health, apply what you have learned in your courses to real-world issues, and contribute your skills and energy to a child and adolescent behavioral health organization. Our students often comment that their field experience positions are personally rewarding and provide great learning experiences.

Even if you have landed your perfect placement, the field experience process can be challenging. Getting to know a new organization or department can feel daunting. Many of our students are working a full or part-time while they complete their field placement, and your Field Supervisor is also likely to have a very busy schedule. And sometimes the focus of your placement or the work you end up doing turn out to be different than what you anticipated.

These situations (and more) are just part of the normal flow of the field experience. Below are some recommendations that are based on feedback from CABH Field Experience students and their field supervisors. We hope they help support a successful field placement experience.

1. **Know your placement agency.** Previous field experience students suggest that you learn as much as possible about your placement agency and the department you are serving in *before* you begin. Take time to review your agency's website in detail including staffing charts, program reports, board members, etc.
2. **Treat your field placement like a job.** This includes producing quality work, being timely, following through on responsibilities you are given, and dressing appropriately for the agency.
3. **Meet regularly with your Field Supervisor.** This is important for your project and will help you remain clear about agency expectations for your work. It is also important to ask for feedback on how you are doing and what you can do to improve. Do not wait until it is time for your written evaluation to get feedback. Make sure your field supervisor has a copy of your FE Proposal and FE Final Paper assignments so that they are clear about what your academic responsibilities are in each semester.
4. **Observe and learn.** Many field placements expose students to people in a variety of agency roles. Introduce yourself to the people around you. Ask questions. Network. There is a lot to learn that is not specific to your project.
5. **Balance taking initiative with accepting guidance.** Agencies generally want you to show initiative in your placement, but you may not feel you have the expertise or enough

knowledge of agency processes to jump in. Remember that you are there to learn. Take initiative and be open to guidance from the people around you. And ask questions when you need to. If you feel like you are not getting enough guidance from your field supervisor or enough emphasis on your project, see #9 below.

6. **Time management.** It is not easy to balance your field experience responsibilities with other aspects of your life, especially if you're taking an additional MS course. Maintain careful attention to the academic deliverables of your field experience by keeping your time log up to date and working on your proposal and final papers throughout the semester. Most students say that getting on a regular schedule helps.
7. **Demonstrate commitment.** The field experience often requires students to be flexible. Demonstrate your commitment to the agency mission by being open to learning opportunities that are different than your specific project of focus. Students report that they have learned a great deal by attending trainings, community events, and agency meetings that were not officially part of their field placement. Also be open to doing mundane tasks like filing or copying if that is the kind of support that is needed.
8. **It takes more than CABH content knowledge.** Although students often note how valuable their CABH skills are, they also rely on a broader skill set that includes a heavy emphasis on written and verbal communication. Field supervisors indicate that they value students who are good writers and have solid analytic skills. They also appreciate students who are comfortable using software such as Excel, PowerPoint, and Word.
9. **Stay in close contact with your advisor.** Touch base with your advisor often during your field experience. Be open about any challenges you are having and seek advice on how your project is developing. If you do not have regular calls scheduled with your advisor, be sure to reach out at least once a month (and maybe more often).
10. **Track your experiences and accomplishments.** Students recommend keeping a notebook of field notes and observations during your placement that documents your experiences. They have found this to be very helpful later when they developing job search cover letters and highlighting skills and experiences on their resumes. Keeping notes about their experiences helps them document everything they learned during their field placement.