

Fieldwork in Psychology PSY 489

PSY 489, Fieldwork in Psychology is an independent learning experience, where students volunteer or are employed in work directly related to psychology. This course is not a requirement of the degree, and is graded by credit/non-credit only. Students are expected to complete three hours of work for each hour of credit. Arrangements for the course must be approved by the Assistant Chair for Undergraduate Studies before the fieldwork begins. Contact the Assistant Chair for Undergraduate Studies or other faculty members to complete necessary forms. This review provides an overview on the experience of fieldwork in psychology, and options for getting involved within the Ohio University community.

What's in it for me? Benefits of PSY 489

Hands-on learning experience in psychology—whether through volunteer experiences or employment opportunities—can play a significant role in helping students to determine career paths in psychology. As Dornan, Borshuizen, King and Scherpbeir (2007) suggest, undergraduates who participate in hands-on learning experiences acquire two important qualities: 1) practical competence and skills; and 2) a state of mind characterized by confidence, motivation, and a sense of professional identity. Both of these characteristics strengthen students' credentials for future employment, and help students to identify the type of career they are most interested in.

For students considering graduate study in clinical or counseling psychology or other practice-related fields (such as social work, or mental health counseling) field work experiences can help you to understand which types of clientele or mental health related issues you enjoy working with (or don't enjoy working with!). Remember, learning what you *don't like to do* is just as important as knowing what you *do like to do!* For some students, field work may even rule out the idea of becoming a practitioner in psychology—as individuals realize that they enjoy other tasks

within professional psychology, such as research or teaching.

While fieldwork can give students exposure to various clinical populations, and a behind the scenes glimpse into the tasks and roles of psychologists and other mental-health practitioners, fieldwork experiences can also be useful to students who are not considering careers in psychological service provision. In fact, many undergraduate students inappropriately assume that volunteer work in psychology is only necessary for individuals who want to one day “practice” psychotherapy or become a mental health counselor! However, even if you don't plan on going into a career as a professional counselor or psychologist, fieldwork can play a critical role in refining vocational interests and building credentials for employment in an array of positions.

In fact, 50% of doctoral degrees in psychology are not in clinical or counseling psychology! And the vast majority of psychology majors do not pursue graduate training. With this in mind, fieldwork can help students to build skills in a range of domains that can aide in developing credentials graduate study in other fields—such as experimental psychology, law, education, or criminal justice—as well as employment following completion of an undergraduate degree.

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Department of Psychology

As a result of engaging in fieldwork in psychology, supervisors may come to know you, your working habits, and your personality quite well. They may be willing to write letters of recommendation for future employment opportunities. These supervisors may also be able to refer you to other employers and opportunities.

The “take home” message is that fieldwork experiences can benefit all undergraduate psychology majors.

What is most important, however, is finding a volunteer or employment position that either:

- 1) exposes you to new aspects of the field;
- 2) helps you to rule out potential careers;
- 3) develops new skills; or
- 4) strengthens existing skills.

Arranging a Fieldwork Experience:

Whereas some fieldwork experiences have been consistently pursued by previous psychology majors, it is also possible for students to participate in a “new” fieldwork experience. All fieldwork experiences, even if they have been pursued by students in the past, must be approved by the Assistant Chair for Undergraduate Studies before the fieldwork begins. Contact the Assistant Chair for Undergraduate Studies or other faculty members of complete necessary forms. To get started, consider the following:

1. Use the web and feedback from other students to research what a potential fieldwork experience will be like. Many of the organizations have local web pages. Check to see if it looks like an experience that you’d find interesting, or if it is a position that will help you to see what a potential

career path in psychology might be like. Try to find a position that seems like a good fit for your current goals in career development.

2. Call the organizations, introducing yourself as a psychology major who is interested in pursuing volunteer opportunities.
3. Inquire if they have openings to volunteer at their facility, and if it would be possible to gather more information.
4. Some organizations will set up a group meeting, and some organizations will set up individual meetings to provide more information on their program. During these information meetings, assess the fit of the opportunity for your current goals in career development.

Although fieldwork experiences for course credit are arranged on a quarter-by-quarter basis, they may also open new avenues for employment within other campus and community organizations. By reflecting on how the fieldwork experience has allowed you to learn more about your own personal and career interests, you can be strategic in thinking about what *other* opportunities will help to further narrow your interests, answer questions you have about the field, or further develop an established interest.

References: Dornan, T., Boshuizen, H., King, N., & Scherpbier, A. (2007). Experience-based learning: A model linking the processes and outcomes of medical students' workplace learning. *Medical Education*, 41, 84-91.

Examples of Organizations where Fieldwork in Psychology may be arranged:

ORGANIZATION	CONTACT PERSON & NUMBER
American Red Cross of Athens	Jane 593-5273
Appalachian Behavioral Healthcare (ABH)	George Eberts 589-4027
Athens Area Hospice	Christie Truly 592-3493
Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities	Jeff Bierlein 592-6659 ext. 254
Athens County Child Advocacy Center	Erin Nash 566-4847
Athens County Children's Services	Barb Cline 592-3061 ext. 127
Athens County Senior Center	Joyce Lewis 594-3535
Athens County Victim Assistance Program	Denise Brooks 592-3212
Autism Society of Southeastern Ohio	Noriko Kantake 205-6810
Beacon School	Cathy Hunter 594-3539 ext. 229
Big Brother/Big Sisters of Athens	Nicole or Jamey Bouwmeester 797-0037
Court Appointed Special Advocates	Rebecca Robinson-Miller 592-3255
Echoing Meadows Residential Center	Lizz Burke 594-3541
Good Works Inc.	Keith Wasserman 594-9000
HAVAR	David Milliken/Debbie Schmieding 740-594-3533
Hickory Creek of Athens	Ashley 797-4561
Hocking-Athens- Perry Community Action Council	Chris Dellameter 767-4500
Holzer Medical Clinic	Dow Saunders 446-5429
Integrated Service Systems	Kevin Gillespie 594-6807
Kids on Campus	Crystal Smith 591-5773; 566-8543
My Sister's Place	Tammy Taylor 594-8337
Ohio University Child Development Center	Cathy Waller - 593-1819
Passion Works	Joyce Frank 740-592-3673 ext. 3
Rural Action	Candi Withem 767-4938
Scioto Point Valley Mental Health Crisis Center	Janie Murphy 775-1260
Students Overcoming Stigma	Amy Meeks 593-1616
Suivivor Advocacy Program of the Ohio University Women's Center	Lindsey Daniels 597-7233
The Gathering Place	Devon Cogar 592-2690
Tri-County Mental Health - Case Management	Kendall Brown 592-3091
Tri-County Mental Health- Sexual Assault Prevention	Lauren Riley 592-3091, ext. 4621
Washington County Children's Services	Diane Kern 373-3485
Wellspring Retreat and Resource Center	Greg Sammons 740-698-6277

For descriptions of these organizations, please view the following file on the Psychology Department's Advising and Resource Center Website:

http://www.ohiopsychology.com/files/images/pdf/Fieldwork_Psy_489_9_7_11.pdf

This link takes you directly to the pdf file with the descriptions.