

Practicum Partners Overall Data

Practicum Partners Listening Session Focus Group Summary

Date: 04.25.19

Participants = 6

Question 1: What are the key issues within the St. Louis community that we will need to effectively engage in over the next five years?

- Racial and health equity
 - Many issues are centered here; want to be sure folks are responsive to complex social needs
- Accessibility of facilities; advocate for strong transportation
- Job training facilities must effectively address strengths and challenges of people with disabilities
 - Need to train students on more disability-friendly practices and communities
- Addressing challenges of gentrification (growth from within and have community leadership)
- City of neighborhoods; create more interconnection
- Expanded mental health services and mental health treatment; opioid crisis
- Support collaborative responses to complex (“wicked”) problems
- Limited opportunities for youth to engage with communities not just in leadership roles; emphasize social emotional growth and support
- Care of mental health professionals
- Improved coaching to help service providers better respond to community needs as identified by them
- Shift from government funding to more private funding
 - Want to have students with an expanded perspective where they can obtain funding and the different funding models
 - Help student learn how to manage organizations in a way that is sustainable (in the black)
 - Help to train social entrepreneurs
- Inequitable distribution of resources is challenge
 - Limited access to knowledge and process
 - Many people are constantly struggling in their own way; cannot see more broadly the impact on the community. Help them have more meaningful engagement so they can be advocates. Educate community members who don’t understand the process so don’t participate.
 - Lack of education and skills to advocate for equity
 - Make this information so folks can relate to it and see themselves within it
- Tackling inequities within the systems and institutions (e.g., social workers, education system)
 - How can we change the system and bring earning back into the community
- Challenging corporations to invest in communities as opposed to charity
 - Must not appeal to support of social sector cannot just appeal on moral grounds; must be seen as a partner
 - Also learn from corporate sector on best practices (e.g., management, leadership, financial)

- Help nonprofits think like corporations
- Brown should have stronger advocacy arm for essential/safety net services
 - Advocacy is needed at the state level to influence/lean on legislators and state level processes; need to do a better job of holding them accountable. (e.g., the many children falling of the Medicaid roles due to processes issues)
- Continued poor outcomes despite promising models
- Building resilient communities – is there anything Brown can do? Building partnerships that can advocate for this.
 - Wanting to improve resilience of the community writ large
- School districts – there are many schools who would benefit from restorative practices
- Need school-based health models. Missouri is lacking in this area

Question 2: What can the Brown School do to ensure a meaningful field experience for both students and field sites?

- Encourage students to try different fields even if not immediately interested in a particular part (e.g., direct practice-interested student had a macro-focused practicum and now knows the landscape)
- Improved systems for students selecting practicums
 - Students are grown and should do most autonomously, but have a system that is accessible and updated
 - Many practicum sites don't update their profiles because don't know how and isn't user friendly. Make sure sites are in the system.
 - Students may not be aware of the Collaborative system; usually just use Simplicity
- Field office should improve the guidance to students on how to find a good fit with practicum site instead of just cold calling.
- Unsure if there's a timeframe for when practicum opportunities should be posted. When are students supposed to have practicums identified? The semester before?
- Improved communication, both content and frequency
 - Frequency and effectiveness can vary across academic advisors
 - More clarity on any changes to structure or logistics (e.g., ELA); regular updates about this
 - Automatic email to remind to upload practicum opportunities
 - No idea what information students are getting about opportunities. Seems to vary across sites. Do sites use a standard practicum opportunity description?
- Biostat/Epi students need data projects which its hard to do over the summer due staff vacations and travel
- Have had high quality students; can be tricky with having students wanting to use all their hours in a short period of time
- Can be difficult to have students without clear focus
- Field sites could be more clear in the scope of what students will get in the practicum
 - By the time students are ready to direct practice there's not much time left. It can be a big learning curve to get them ready. It typically takes 2 semesters.
- Greater training of field supervisors to better support student in their career development and transition into a new field
- Has been more difficulty to get students to stay for an extended period of time
- Some students are disappointed about the lack of focus on ability-status at Brown School. Student was uncomfortable talking to practicum supervisor about it. What are the supports and rules when you have a disabled practicum student?

Question 3: What is one thing we must change (e.g., do more of, do less of, get rid of) if we are to have a successful field education program in the future?

- Not nearly enough dialogue, training, and action for students around ability-status at the Brown School
 - Greater emphasis on training and capacity building for engaging with students with different abilities
- Not helpful to conduct practicum site visits towards the end of the semester – don't have time to make any adjustments for the students' experience
- Keep the field education seminars, particularly the ethics session
 - Consider if there are other topics for the trainings (e.g., student career development)
- Wish there was a continuing education track for practicum supervisors that was free
- More of the field instructor institutes --really like the annual appreciation days. Also the little things of appreciation go a long way (e.g., swag)
- More opportunities to network with other field instructors and learn from each other. Also see where students are going

Question 4: What in our school culture needs to change for the future?

- Greater emphasis on local needs and context and want more students focused on this. Many practicum students are focused on global health.
- Huge emphasis on specialization and niche interests; a focus on generalist practice is not nearly strong enough
 - Students are unable to have a reference point for other types of practice
- Why no bachelor's of social work?
 - The foundation that's needed for social work practice may not be captured enough in the first semester
- Enjoyed that instructors at Brown School were also practitioners
- Transdisciplinary; "well-rounded"
- Huge emphasis on evidence-based approach – research focus; is part of the WashU culture; may be a bit dehumanizing and sterilizing

Question 5: What opportunities exist for the Brown School that you think we should take advantage of, but haven't?

- Scholarships for students who are not the "stellar" students
 - More needs based vs. merit based
- More opportunities for local students to attend WUSTL
 - Intentionally nurture the local talent; promotion and marketing of WashU
 - Are they promoting WUSTL in local public and alternative schools?
- Continue to have skill-based classes (e.g., budgeting & fiscal management; GIS). They have been very helpful in in current roles.
- More discussion of health administration and insurance, other pertinent topics that are pressing in US and internationally
- How does the community surrounding the university benefit from its presence?

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Participants=5

- P1 -1 practicum student, 1st time having a practicum student
- P2 - 5 students annually
- P3 - 6-10 students annually
- P4 - 5-7 students per semester
- P5 – unknown; came late

Discussion:

Question 1: What are the key issues within the St. Louis community that we will need to effectively engage in over the next five years?

- P1 – She’s a Brown school graduate. A lot of students are not from the area, so they have different perspectives, but they need to understand the region more – some exposure to what goes on in the region. This might help minimize some stress they face when they start practicum.
- P3 – Some sort of “history of STL” foundation course.
- P1 – The introduction of students happens mostly. Exposure should be closer to before students start practicum. It could be a course, a book, not sure what form it should take.
- P2 – Equity and diversity. Practicum students tend to be young, white, female. There needs to be a deep dive, a course, grappling with white privilege. Some students are in white savior mode, most try to be sensitive, but they need help. Knowledge gained is also going to be important throughout their career
- P4 – Red Cross is trying to exposure students to Red Cross’s Diversity & Inclusion committee and what the committee’s goals are. All WashU Red Cross practicum students are not from the area, unlike students from other STL universities. A lot of fires are in at-risk areas, and students go out with the disaster action team when houses first start burning. Students have been receptive to wanting to have a broad experience.
- P5 – She facilitated a class on Public Health. Some students took a tour with Dr. Kirkland that they found eye-opening. Gentrification is happening in many cities, not just STL, so that information will be helpful. It may be helpful to get co-facilitators that live and work in STL to help with classes since instructors/professors don’t seem to be from STL usually.
- P1 – Could use the seminar classes as a way to expose students. It is also important that students are prepared to deal with the issues that they may face when they start work in the community.
- P3 – Students need to have a deeper understanding of the following: local policy and politics (mayors, local school boards), gerrymandering, living wages, gentrification, health disparities, racial marginalization, distribution of resources, education inequities.
- P5 – Students need deeper understanding of systemic racism and history, how current policies contribute to reinforcement of racial disparities.

- P5 – Students should be taught trauma informed care and self-care as preparation for practicum.
- P4 – Red Cross is merging across 2 states – Missouri and Arkansas- it may be helpful to let students understand how organizations go through many changes, realignments and mergers.
- P1 – Students need more exposure to Professor Kirkland and his STL class referred to as “the Kirkland difference”. Despite being from the region, she learnt a lot about the region from him. He brings leaders from the community to his STL class.
- P2 – Illinois needs school certified social workers. She knows the Brown School has been trying to tackle, but it’d be nice to have WashU students be a presence for the whole region – MO & IL.

Question 2: What can Brown School do to ensure a meaningful field experience for both students and field sites?

- Points mentioned in earlier question: Deeper understanding of STL: strengths, challenges, systemic racism
- P3 – The organization does a lot of referring to partner organizations, and it is usually a steep learning curve for students. It’d be good for students to come to practicum already having a sense of what the resources in the area are.
- P5 – Students should have some understanding of the different levels of community engagement and how to truly listen, instead of coming in as just experts.
- P1 – Students should be able to understand the different roles in an organization, but know not to lose the passion and desire for change/effectiveness in the organizations they do their practicum with – they need the words to communicate their frustration regarding discrepancy between theory and practice at their practicum sites.
- P1 – Some students are frustrated with the field office. There should be more communication between the field office and students to let them know that there are some things that they won’t be able to help students with, like the inevitable clash between in-class and real world practice.
- P4 – Some students experience crisis that will affect their ability to be effective at their practicum, like transportation issues or family issues. It is important for students to know that they can talk to the field office about it, and the office can be a resource in helping to solve the problem.

Question 3: What is one thing we must change (e.g., do more of, do less of, get rid of) if we are to have a successful field education program in the future?

- P3 – There is a partnership between WashU, SLU, Fontbonne, and one more university in the region. Currently, organizations have to complete paperwork/applications to be practicum sites for each of the schools individually. It may be helpful to be able to do that once for all universities.
- P1 – The practicum sites training, there are 6-7 of them, and the dates/times are tough for practicum supervisors to make. Full day meetings may be better than half day meetings

(reducing frequency of the trainings). The school should find ways to make it easier for practicum supervisors to be present at the meetings.

- P2 – One of the sessions was always full, it fills up fast, so it's hard for people to attend.
- P3 – Occasionally, there are students that seem to be in the field for the wrong reasons or seem to be unsuited for the field. She wonders what the school is doing to counsel those students.
- P4 – Foundation practicum students from other universities usually start in the fall, unlike WashU students that tend to start in the spring. This causes an issue for Red Cross sometimes because students that start in the fall (from other schools) tend to remain in the spring semester, limiting the number of WashU students that can be accepted for semester practicums.

Question 4: What in our school culture needs to change for the future?

- P3 – How does the school ensure diversity in the program? The school should focus on that. Lived experience is important.
- P5 – Based on what she has heard, students of color don't seem to feel really supported by the school.
- P1 – WashU seems to be more research based, as opposed to being involved in issues in the community. The school should find a way for the research to make an impact in the community while conducting research. WashU should be more strategic about having impact in the community, and it should give students more opportunities to participate in the community.
- P3 – She hasn't heard a lot of WashU being mindful of how their actions impact the area, eg. The ongoing expansion in the Grove area. WashU may have a lot of moving parts, but the Brown school could do more - Writing editorials, making statements, Brown School students having sizeable influence over WashU's overall decisions regarding the local community.
- P4 – The Brown school should do a better job of integrating students into the community in times of crises.
- P1 – She went to the Brown School around the time Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, and a lot of students were frustrated that the school wasn't doing more in the community.

- Q5 – What opportunities exist for Brown School that you think we should take advantage of, but haven't?
- P2 – She thinks that the Brown School hasn't done enough to address racial equality, equity, and the culture question. The Brown schools should grapple with these because STL is a microcosm of the bigger world.
- P5 – Equity issues seem to pop up among staff and students.
- P1 – Diversity and Inclusion needs to be in writing and statistics, not just talked about. It keeps people honest when percentages are not there. It was really important for her to see professors that are like her. Everyone talks about WashU being a bubble, and there seems to be a pride when that is referenced. The bubble needs to be minimized, and that pride needs to go away – WashU needs to be a part of its larger community.

- P4 – Recommends additional collaboration with organizations in the region, like Better Family Life, and greater visibility of those collaborations. There is a “diversity in North STL” office, and the Brown school could partner with them.
- P3 – Students have said that a lot of concentration courses are taught by adjunct professors, who are not preparing them adequately. It seems like the classes are only useful for graduation, as opposed to preparing students for practice. The concentration courses are not as consistent as foundation courses.
- P5 – There are a lot of collective impact projects going on in STL, so the school can partner with some of the initiatives so that students can get yearlong real world experience that is not limited to just practicum.
- P2- She suggested a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion class that has roleplaying on what is appropriate to do when practicum student and you notice something off in their service organization. How do students use their voice to tackle organization discrimination? How do students advocate for change when are practicum students or they start their careers and are the sole social workers in their environment?
- P1 – There could be a board of WashU students created to help students address real world community issues and challenges as a group. This could go a step further than roleplaying since students sometimes seem disconnected from role-play activities.

Question 6: Any additional thoughts

- P4 - The training for field instructors was not brought up. She has enjoyed the trainings and gotten a lot out of them.
- P3 – Asked whether the following question has been brought up among Brown school leadership: Can post-master’s certificate courses be part of the tuition benefits program for staff?
- P1 – Participants were not asked whether students seem prepared for their practicums. Theoretically, students are on point, prepared, excited, when they start their practicums. However, socially and administratively, they don’t seem very prepared to deal with people not being so nice, they seem to be a little timid. It’d be good for them to get more experiences working with others. Students ask a lot of questions, which is good. While she has not had problems personally, she has heard from other practicum supervisors that some students may feel like since they are not getting paid, they don’t have to give their all to the practicum.
- P4 – [On preparedness of students] The MPH practicum students her organization has had so far - 2 or 3 that she worked with - left some great information and resources for the Red Cross. One did a research on social media, helping the org to connect with clients. One did a study on how to improve access to disaster shelters for persons with disabilities; the study was kicked up to the national office. WashU practicum students tend to leave information that the RC can use in their strategic planning.
- P1 – [On preparedness of students] Her student is doing a study to help the organization to be more racially equitable. She notices her whiteness in the room and is open to talking about it, which was really refreshing.

- P3 – [On preparedness of students] Students are very energetic, and they seem to feel empowered to be able to do their own project on what they think needs to be more effective within their practicum organization.