

**A Practicum of Fairness:  
Smart Practices for Undergraduate Professional Program Practicum  
Assessment**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## INTRODUCTION AND DEFINING THE ISSUE

The primary purpose of this project is to research, summarize, analyze, and report on smart practices of the practicum process by performing a literature review and building on the experiences of practicum coordinators through survey response and interviews. The report is intended to be utilized by the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) and senior administration of practicum programs across British Columbia as a resource to establish future priorities and provide direction for practicum assessment communication and appeal mechanisms. The practicum makes up an essential part of many undergraduate professional programs and appears in different forms depending on the discipline: field experience, cooperative education, internships, and clinical practicum. The professional practicum is designed to give students a supervised practical application of studied theory and prepare graduates for the world of the workplace (Ryan, Toohey, and Hughes, 1996, pp. 355).

In researching this objective, the concept of fairness within the three sides of the fairness triangle – relational, procedural and substantive – is examined in relation to how this affects the students and programs who participate in undergraduate professional practicum assessment. Although this study has decided to focus on the undergraduate level of higher education, it is believed each of the recommendations presented may also be applied to graduate students in similar practicum programs.

The participatory needs assessment inform recommendations for smart practices in dealing with performance in practicum placements currently occurring in post-secondary programs across British Columbia. The research question that this project attempts to answer is: **“What professional practicum practices are effective in ensuring a sense of relational, procedural and substantive fairness within post-secondary professional programs?”**

Research of this type is important as the exploration will allow the researcher to formulate possible recommendations based on the literature review, survey and interviews among administrative professionals. For ombuds offices and post-secondary administration, students increasingly come for council regarding clarity around placements and assessment and how to appeal when dealing with issues of their practicum (Conway, 2017). As a result, it is important to set clear expectations of practicum placement, professional conduct and ethics, as well as an understanding of the characteristics of assessment during a practicum. Equally important is an understanding of what avenues will be followed when expectations are not met, and what appeal mechanisms are open to the student before any consequences are dealt. As post-secondary institutions move toward the integration of experiential learning into the general curriculum (Johnston & Sator, 2017, p. 7) and BC government’s provincial mandate is relying on increased field experience development (Horgan, 2017, p. 2)), programs will be better served if gaps are identified and smart practices are established.

## METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The methodology for this project was a participatory needs assessment supported by a smart practices approach. To gather data for the needs and smart practices assessment, a literature review was conducted to identify the scholarly analysis on key themes related to this topic and

further refine and influence the data research instruments. The needs gap was a theoretical framework from the perspective of the practicum coordinators and how issues presented by the participants could work toward solutions within a relational, procedural and substantive fairness point of view.

Two distinct groups were identified for this participatory needs assessment. First, a focus group consultation among senior administration in academic programs was formed to obtain information on sensitivities, barriers and contributions in the practicum process. Secondly, a survey of practicum coordinators from post-secondary institutions in British Columbia provided information on current successes and challenges with practicum placement, assessment and appeal process. Finally, interviews were conducted with these same participants to further expand on the themes of smart practice and challenges in the field education experience. There are 35 public and private post-secondary institutions within British Columbia (Post-Secondary System, 2018) however, as the British Columbia faction of ACCUO are clients of this project and worked to facilitate discussion with their colleagues before participation, the studied institutions were limited to fourteen schools within six institutions who employ an ombudspersons office as a current member. According to Ross and Jaafar, a participatory needs assessment entails an approach in which trained evaluators and program stakeholders share responsibility for all substantive and procedural decisions (2006, pp. 131). In this way the practicum coordinators of each institution participate as consultants for the research. Participation is hoped to ensure cooperation in the sharing of ideas and buy-in for recommendations provided.

This information is helpful for post-secondary professional practicum programs across Canada and will be presented to the Association of Canadian College and university Ombudspersons biannual conference.

## **KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

A literature review was conducted to identify current thinking and smart practices related to the ombuds office triangle of fairness and the practicum process. The collected information was utilized to help guide and refine the interview questions for the participants' consultation.

The following are general recommendations flowing from the literature review, participant survey and interview discussions. They are presented to assist undergraduate professional programs in consideration of smart practices and possible next steps. The intention is for practicum coordinators to use this as a guide for their own programs, for ombudspersons to provide smart practice considerations for their institutions, and for senior administration to consider when reviewing or designing programs with experiential learning components.

**Recommendation 1** - Begin collecting and utilizing aggregate data to inform and review existing policies and practices in the areas of practicum placement, assessment and appeal.

**Recommendation 2** - Develop and implement an accessible formal policy and procedure handbook that includes rules and regulations, including appeal mechanisms for incoming practicum students.

**Recommendation 3** – Celebrate and cultivate the mentorship role within placement agencies, schools and hospitals through the development of a package to inform mentors about the

practicum process, and the roles and responsibilities of mentorship in addition to recognizing their valued importance to the student practicum process.

**Recommendation 4** - Develop a specific online or in-class course to impart skills of professional expectation and workplace culture for practicum students.

**Recommendation 5** – Implement the creation of an advisory committee consisting of practicum or field-experience coordinators, faculty, students, field mentors, community partners, and alumni to support and connect the various components of the practicum community.

**Recommendation 6** - Encompass faculty, instructors, mentors, and practicum coordinators in the process of program curriculum review where appropriate.

**Recommendation 7** – Understanding the need for equity in the placement, assessment and appeal process, highlight the calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to indigenize professional programs and bring this teaching into communities.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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This section is meant to introduce the issue of the practicum for practicum coordinators in post-secondary education and how framing the issue with an ombuds fairness triangle may lend itself well to formulate a guide of smart practices for the field experience.

## 1.1 CLIENT INTRODUCTION AND ISSUE DEFINITION

Each ombuds office submits an annual report on the work of the office, including any issues that have arisen that year. This information includes statistical records, observations and general themes on the prevalent and pervasive issues relevant to students' experience of fairness (Office of the Ombudsperson Annual Reports, 2018). A recurring inquiry, concern and/or grievance which arises for many postsecondary ombuds offices across Canada tend to centre on the practicum (Conway, 2017). Typical issues consist of dissatisfaction with the student placement selection process, perceptions of bias and/or abuse of power by field supervisors and/or other employees in professional facilities, a dissatisfaction with the evaluation process during the practicum assessment, or the limited opportunity for appeal. As well, Conway attests unsupported issues with field placements, a lack of specific policies and/or arbitrary/inconsistent application of policies, and the unawareness of specific protocol for specific placements contribute to an important issue both the ombuds office and institution administrative units are eager to tackle (Algonquin, 2014; University of the Fraser Valley, 2013; Douglas College, 2012).

Despite significant issues arising, only a small number of Canadian universities utilize an ombuds office for management of issues arising from the practicum process. Instead issues dealt with by the academic unit involved or remain unresolved, resulting in students failing the program or leaving voluntarily. An Ombudsperson in a post-secondary setting primarily reports to the President of a university or college. The office is jointly funded by students and the university to further promote and enhance independence (Nakata, 2016, p. 3). The office has no authority to make or change decisions that have been made nor does it take sides. The role of an ombuds office is not one of advocacy and an ombudsperson takes care to avoid the perception of being an advocate for either the student or the university (Conway, 2017). According to the ACCUO Standards of Practice (2012), the standards of practice for an ombudsperson in higher education focus on fairness, equity and respect.

The ombudsperson builds capacity to help make the institution accountable to its own values and mission statement. In working with individuals, the ombudsperson facilitates fair resolutions that build trust and fortify the relationship between individuals and the institution (ACCUO Standards of Practice, 2012, p. 1).

This research seeks to examine the concept of fairness as it pertains the Fairness Triangle criteria (Office of the Ombudsman, 2017) and how this theory is brought forth in practice for different professional practicum programs. An analysis of professional school's websites,



handbooks, and policies are combined with emerging issues surrounding practicum assessment structures, assessment, and appeal mechanisms to reveal a smart practice framework for use by post-secondary institutions in order to inform programs on the smart practices of practicum assessment.

The concept of fairness in the ombuds community is widespread. Although this research will narrow the focus to six College and University ombuds offices and fourteen professional schools within British Columbia, it is useful to expand some readings on the concept of fairness to a wider field in other public service areas. As a result, Fiona Crean's (2010) "Defining Fairness. The Office of the Ombudsman and the City of Toronto Public Service: Working Together" as well as Irene Hamilton's (2009) "Understanding Fairness: A Handbook on Fairness for Manitoba Municipal Leaders" informs the project in combination with more academic research in "Departments that Work: Building and sustaining cultures of excellence in academic programs" by J. Wergin (2003) and Ariel Avgar's (2011), "The Ombudsman's Ability to Influence Perceptions of Organizational Fairness: Toward a Multi-Stakeholder Framework"

## **1.2 PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The purpose of this project is to gain a better understanding of what administrative practicum coordinators perceive to be factors that inhibit or enhance a practicum student's expectation of the practicum experience and what effective practices and processes they have implemented. The research question that this project will attempt to answer is: "What professional practicum practices are effective in improving understanding and fairness for university staff, students and mentors?"

The scope of the project was limited to undergraduate professional programs, specially the schools of Social Work, Nursing, Child and Youth Care, and Education. The effectiveness of the practices were viewed through the lens of the fairness triangle in which the process, procedure and ideology was one of procedural, relational and substantive fairness. Feedback was gathered by practicum coordinators and senior administration in an effort to understand the issues, challenges and obstacles that arise through the practicum process. Practicum agencies, faculty and students were not a part of this study.

This research project will allow the researcher to formulate possible recommendations in order to improve practicum outcomes for undergraduate post-secondary students who are undergoing a practicum experience. The recommendations should hopefully contribute to greater understanding where students and mentors feel supported and respected. From the university's perspective, an effective practicum program will lead to greater efficiency that can be redirected to other important initiatives. The report is intended to be used by the Association of Canadian College and university Ombudspersons and various practicum programs across BC as a resource to establish future smart practices and provide direction for future practicum program material. The value of transparent process is significant from both a financial and fairness point of view.

## **1.3 ORGANIZATION OF REPORT**

The overall structure of the report takes the form of various chapters including this introductory chapter.

Chapter 2 begins by laying out background information on the BC division of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons and an overview of Fairness Triangle. Another section is devoted to the undergraduate professional programs involved in this research and the practicum coordinators who administer the programs.

Chapter 3's literature review discusses the broad spectrum of concepts in practicum research. This section will explore the history of the practicum in post-secondary education. The literature review identifies current and the collected information helps to guide and refine the interview questions during participant discussions among practicum administration.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the participatory needs assessment research design and the methodology: a description of who the participants are for this project; how those participants were recruited; how the survey and interviews were conducted; how the analysis of the interviews will be performed; and an identification of the limitations of the research.

Chapter 5 presents a narrative and summary of the key findings from the focus group consultation undertaken during this research.

Chapter 6 gives a summary and critique of the findings of both the survey and the interviews as a result of the consultation with the practicum coordinator stakeholders.

Chapter 7 draws upon the entire project, providing a discussion and analysis of the research project and identifies future research opportunities.

Chapter 8 offers recommendations for the client's consideration.

Chapter 9 provides a conclusion for the research project.

## 2 BACKGROUND

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This section provides an overview of the client, the Association of Canadian College and university Ombudspersons, and the research participants to provide context for this research project.

### 2.1 UNIVERSITY OMBUDSPERSONS

In general, the practicum experience is most successful when it is supported by the overall campus culture to encourage procedural, relational, and substantive fairness.

The ombudsperson's job is not only to be an advocate for students but to help the campus community to understand the best way in which to provide information for their students and navigate the appeal process in a fair manner. As a result, the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons have created a resource in which to examine the decision-making process for administration in higher education (Appendix A).

In terms of practicum issues, the ombuds office may be called upon to give advice on issues from the initial placement process to the experience and resulting grade. In Martine Conway's 2011 Ombuds Office report, a typical case summary was presented in which a student in a professional program was not satisfied with the results of the practicum. The ombudsperson invited the student to evaluate their options, which included a grade appeal or a repeat of the practicum. The student understood how to better approach issues which arise in the workplace and elected to repeat the practicum with a greater perspective (Conway, 2011, p. 2).

Ombuds office in higher education are widely recognized for their role in independence, impartiality, confidentiality, and accessibility. The ombudsperson role provides information and advice, uses conflict resolution methods or investigative techniques to intervene when appropriate, may provide recommendations in case-specific or systemic matters, and finally, produce annual reports and remain well-informed with regards to service quality (ACCUO, 2015, p. 5). Under the Association of Canadian Colleges and University Ombudspersons, six ombuds offices from various post-secondary institutions in British Columbia provide services and support to 15 different undergraduate professional practicum programs within their respective institutions (Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons, 2018).

The ombudspersons within BC contribute to ACCUO's standards of practice and concept of fairness by assisting their institutions through reports which show how the majority of inquiries and complaints are resolved. They do this by providing information for the student or by problem-solving the issue with the parties involved. Investigations are generally conducted in an informal, non-adversarial manner. In an effort to improve fairness and equity at the individual and systemic levels, Canadian academic ombudspersons offer a spectrum of practice using a range of tools appropriate to the situation within the institutional context (Conway, CCCUO Asilomar presentation, 2013).

### 2.2 THE FAIRNESS TRIANGLE

Fairness was discussed in a 2014 ACCUO Western Regional Meeting and established, in the context of the higher-level education as both fundamentally about process and context-dependent

(ACCUO, 2014, pg.4). The ombudsperson is in a role which must avoid conflict of interest in order for students and the rest of the campus community to trust their advice. In this way, fairness is practiced via an understanding of the various perspectives of students and post-secondary institutions (ACCUO, 2014, pg.4).

The fairness triangle serves as a tool which individual offices may take forward to their administration to show how fairness is practiced and how to promote the concept. This was adapted by the University of Victoria Ombuds office through the Ombudsman Saskatchewan to be used by students, staff, faculty or administrators whether they are the decision makers or affected persons.

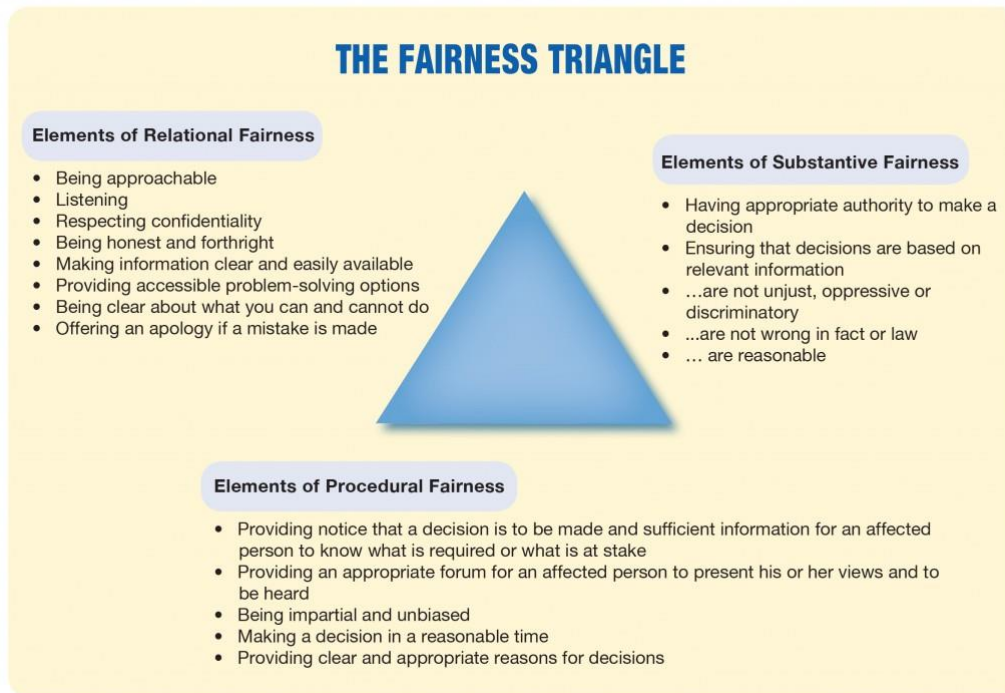
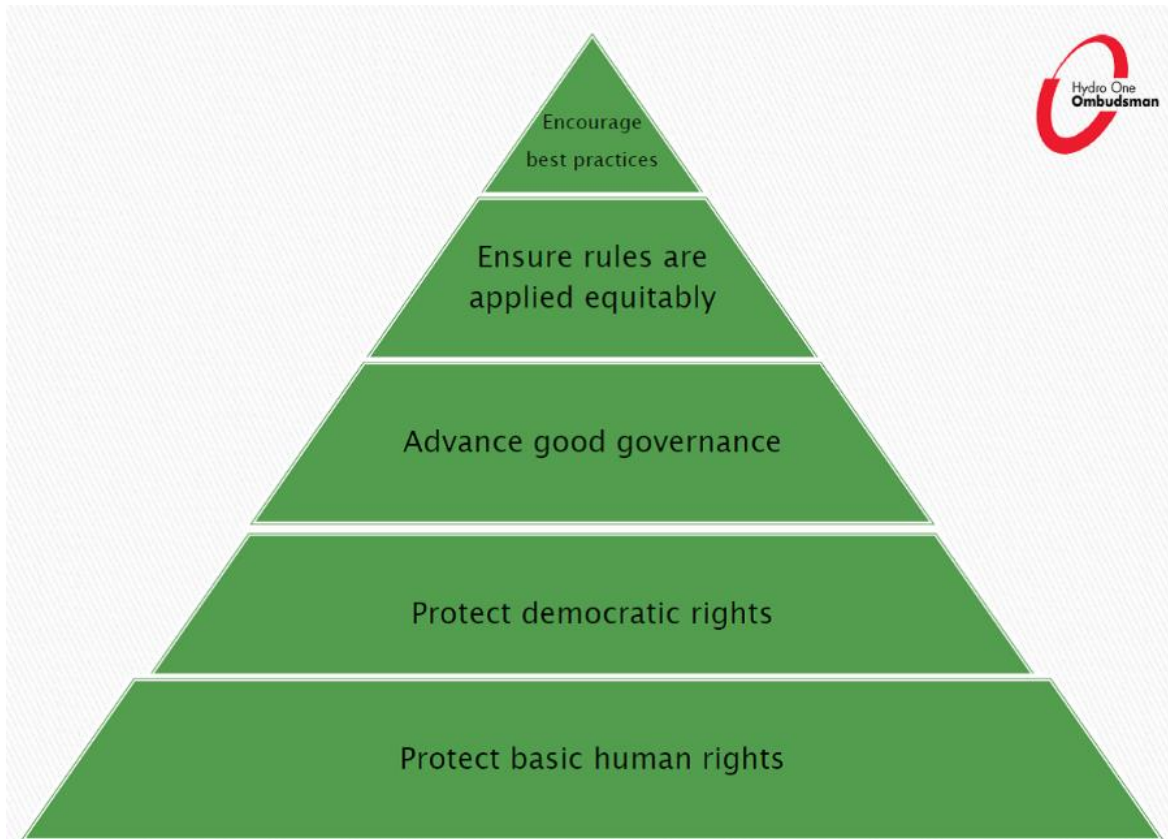


Figure 1: Ombuds office at the University of Victoria, (“Because Fairness Matters”)

The Fairness Triangle of the Saskatchewan Ombudsman has become the ongoing method of evaluating fairness in organizations across Canada. The triangle focuses on the three aspects of fairness – procedural, relational, and substantive. Some organizations and institutions have even adapted it for their own use, and many ombudspersons provide courses on applying fairness principles in their daily work. For example, Shirley Nakata, the ombudsperson from the University of British Columbia, has developed a session from the framework of Administrative Law which utilizes the process by which decisions are made, the substance of those decisions and how errors are remedied by the courts (Nakata, 2017, pg.1). In this session the ombuds role is to, without formal power, identify and address administrative injustice and unfairness and help to humanize bureaucracy for the individual who must navigate it (Nakata, 2017, pg.2).

In the post-secondary environment, fairness has its own unique situations. In Fiona Crean’s 2016 Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (OEEO) presentation, she mentions an alternate term for the category of Relational Fairness; Equitable Fairness.



*Figure 2: Hydro One Ombudsman, Fiona Crean, OEEO presentation slide, 2016*

Equitable, or Relational, fairness is the importance of considering a person’s social location. This means understanding the lens of a practicum students in terms of education, ethnicity, creed, culture, language, geographic location, family status, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and disability (Crean, 2016). As a result, it is important people are treated fairly, not necessarily identically, in order to focus on the result.

Procedural Fairness also refers to the rules of natural justice. This speaks to the method that administrators should follow in order to maintain a sense of transparency and understanding of their process. Actions include ensuring students are aware of all the information that will be considered in the decision and the opportunity to present their side with relevant documentation. The decision process for appeal must take place within a reasonable period of time, be impartial, provide the necessary support to understand the process, and most importantly, understand the right to an appeal (Hamilton, 2009).

Substantive fairness represents the fairness of the decision in that decision makers are ensuring they are taking all relevant information into account. The rationale for the decision should be clear and, in practicum situations, students will understand the rationale for the result. It is also important that the decision is not oppressive to a particular group and is equitable under the applicable laws of the jurisdiction (Crean, 2010, Hamilton, 2009).

## **2.3 THE PRACTICUM**

Besides the legal obligation concerning administrative law and natural justice as well as the efficiency of appeal prevention and student retention, post-secondary institutions have a vested interest to ensure an inclusive and respectful workplace for their practicum students.

The practicum in a professional program will mean different things depending on the school in which the practicum is taught however, the basic premise of a practicum is the real-world application of certain required areas of a field of study. As a result, each of the undergraduate programs in this research is associated with a central practicum detailing all of the key required portions of its application leading to the final credential. The schools identified below were chosen due to the depth of history and extensive experience in the practicum process.

### **2.3.1 Social Work**

The Social Work field placement experience is careful to integrate the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom with real life situations in the community (Charles & Dharamsi, 2010). Field Education is the component of the school of social work in undergraduate study in Canada in which students spend a minimum of 700 hours in field placements during the course of their university training (CASSW Standards, 2007). This field work accounts for approximately 40% of their total social work student experience. The goal of the field education experience is the "development of practice competence and the preparation of a professionally reflective, self-effacing, knowledgeable and developing social worker" (CASSW Standards, 2007, pp. 9).

### **2.3.2 Child and Youth Care**

The Child and Youth Care field-based practicum places great importance on the need for relating abstract frameworks to the complexities of everyday practice (White, 2007).

The field-based practicum component of the Child and Youth Care undergraduate degree is required during the second, third and fourth years of the program (University of Victoria, May 2018). Students enrolled in practicum courses must demonstrate competence in all four professional practice areas: professionalism and ethical behaviour; ability to accept, integrate and implement feedback; emotional self-regulation; ability to take responsibility for learning. The goal of the practicum is to synthesize the student's learning and prepare them for the workforce (Child and Youth Care Practicum, 2018).

### **2.3.3 Education**

The Education practicum is considered a reflective placement opportunity wherein pre-service teachers are able to reflect on and discuss general professional issues with experienced teachers (Mattsson, Eilertsen, and Rorrison, 2011). The initial emphasis is on a gradual orientation to the school setting with a two-week school placement. After this acclimatization period, the focus shifts to a 10-week extended practicum in order to experience the challenges of an increased teaching load and added responsibilities (Bachelor of Education Practicum, 2018).

### **2.3.4 Nursing**

The School of Nursing hospital practicum experience involves a coordinator who works with a hospital liaison in order to support the educational activities of health care professionals. As a result, practicums have an obligation to protect the public interest, public safety, and public health as students conform to accepted standards of professional, competent and safe practice in their work with patients, clients, and co-workers (Nursing Practicum Appeal Process, U of A).

Clinical practice is offered in a variety of settings and consist of a total of 12 weeks with the aim to demonstrate the competencies and Standards of Practice (CRNBC, 2018, pp.7).

Undergraduate practicum programs within British Columbia supported by an ombudsperson office exist among the following post-secondary institutions: Camosun College, Simon Fraser University (SFU), University of British Columbia (UBC), University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBC-O), University of Victoria (UVic), and Vancouver Community College (VCC). These programs have practicum coordinators which work with their respective ombud’s office in order to accommodate issues which may occur in placement, assessment and appeal situations.

|                |                    |           |         |             |
|----------------|--------------------|-----------|---------|-------------|
| <b>CAMOSUN</b> | Child & Youth Care |           | Nursing |             |
| <b>SFU</b>     |                    | Education |         | Social Work |
| <b>UBC</b>     |                    | Education | Nursing | Social Work |
| <b>UBC-O</b>   |                    | Education | Nursing | Social Work |
| <b>UVIC</b>    | Child & Youth Care | Education | Nursing | Social Work |
| <b>VCC</b>     |                    |           | Nursing |             |

*Table 1: ACCUO supported undergraduate professional programs*

## 2.4 PRACTICUM COORDINATORS AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERS

The role of the practicum, field placement or field experience coordinator can vary from each professional program depending on the theory and environment in which each program presents their curriculum to the practice. Nevertheless, a practicum coordinator generally works to facilitate the administration of the courses, seminar, and practical aspect of their program. This includes the development and generation of practicum experiences, liaising and meeting with community organizations, school and hospital teams, and maintaining an up-to-date organization of the development of the students. Pairing students within a professional environment means that the position requires coordinators to

- recruit sites to offer placements in the program,
- hold information sessions for students,
- review applications and manages the initial screening for the selection process,
- communicate with agencies and track students throughout the practicum,
- troubleshoot challenges with the students and/or placements,
- provide instructional support for coursework required,
- document student progress,
- assign practicum completion or failure,
- oversee appeal issues,
- seek and integrates feedback from students and supervisors to improve practicum process, and
- deal with failure in progress (Placement Coordinator Job Description 992268, UVic).

Out of the fourteen post-secondary undergraduate professional programs examined in this project, five employ only one coordinator or placement officer for each program. These consisted of both community colleges and the Okanagan satellite campus for the University of

British Columbia. Six out of fourteen employ two main administrators and two employ three administrators. This would not include the administrative staff which would typically support their operations in addition to the communication with receiving and destination coordinators, such as the Health Sciences Placement Network (HSP Net), who may be working in the profession for which the program seeks to train. The typical cohort for a professional program among those interviewed for this study was 300-400 students per year. Building relationships with agencies and placing students is an enormous task. Competition for placements between different institutions and among various internal programs become a concern as cohorts grow or agencies limit the number of placements they are able to supervise.

### 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

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Literature research allows for highlighting existing knowledge gaps and comparing areas of agreement and disagreement amongst practicum evaluation and administration. The collected information was utilized to help guide and refine the interview questions for the stakeholders' consultation. Factors that inform and expand a student's knowledge and understanding in regard to the practicum component are identified throughout the literature and findings.

The literature review is based on both academic and grey literature. While Canadian sources are viewed as most relevant since the institutions studied operate under accreditation frameworks beholden to provincial authority, some international literature is included to examine practices in the United States and Asia. The main focus throughout the literature review was research pertaining to contributors and barriers to the practicum experience. Searches were conducted through the University of Victoria's library and internet research - Google Scholar and Metacrawler - using key words such as "practicum evaluation", "field experience assessment", "professionalism training", "practicum mentorship" and "practicum appeal mechanisms". All resources were evaluated using Manhein's (2007, p. 5) guiding principles of "authority, objectivity, accuracy, currency and coverage".

The purpose of higher education is "to prepare students to participate in and take responsibility for their communities and professions" (Sullivan, Rosin, Shulman, & Fenstermacher, 2008, Forward). The practical or clinical portion of the professional program has long been a key component of an undergraduate education. Rooted historically in the early apprenticeship preparation of craftsmen in the guilds of Europe (Epstein, 1998, pg. 684). The foundational premise upon which all of these practice-based programs is based is the "authentic, deep-learning" which occurs when students apply relevant theoretical knowledge and skills to solve real-life encounters which would normally be met by actual practitioners of the field (Renzulli, Gentry, & Reis, 2004).

#### 3.1 HISTORY OF FIELD EDUCATION

Originally, learning through practice in professional programs came before academic theory or formal training. A cohesive knowledge base for the social work profession, for example, was only established once the training for professional programs was proven within the sphere of university theory (James, 2005, p. 70). In fact, the inclusion of the university into the field led to a theoretical framework that excluded apprenticeship preparation. As a result, the profession identified the need to match this learning with real-world learning once more; where theory could be translated into practice. This was associated with theatrical performance theory where students are given the opportunity to act on the learned theories in the culture and patterns of the profession (James, 2005, p. 72). Nevertheless, very little research has been invested into field work training in general. James suggests this may have to do with the bias of university theorists. It is easier for academia to measure and evaluate scholarship than expertise and aptitude in a student's ability to work with people. The result of which means the academic must rely on non-university practitioner judgment (James, 2005, p. 73). Academic faculty may not be as reluctant to rely on practicum mentors as this author suggests. Instead, this may be more a matter of capacity and roles assigned within the university environment. More involvement in the

practicum experience would provide incentive to assign learning outcomes not foreign to any experiential learning curriculum.

In more recent years, there is a growing demand for well-prepared professionals in all disciplines. This is shown in the increase of co-op education opportunities and the trend toward more experiential learning in curriculum across the post-secondary curriculum (Johnston & Sator, 2017, pp.7). Effective learning from experience requires attention to the ways in which organizations learn at the individual, group and organizational levels (Cross, Israelit, Cross, Israelit, 2000, pg. 103). The professional fields examined in this research each have long established history of practicum programs however, there are many ways in which they differ. As with Jose Pereira's examination of the University of Toronto's engineering program, there are a variety of assessment measures, credit assignment, and practicum length. These variations raise difficulties when comparing and prescribing a smart practice guide (Pereira, 2010). Consequently, smart practice recommendations must remain general enough to account for different program requirements.

### **3.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FACULTY IN THE PRACTICUM PROCESS**

Research by Deanna Reising and Lynn Devich (2004, pp. 15) illustrates the importance of criterion-referenced evaluation rather than norm-based, subjective judgment. As a result, standardized evaluation tools are built upon each other and the course content of the program with reliability and validity. The teacher has an important place in this assessment regarding consistency among evaluators and continuous assessment opportunities which speaks to a student's progression (pp. 16). The competency-based curriculum in Indiana University School of Nursing was created to meet the National League of Colleges of Nursing expectations at the end of each academic year. The evaluation criteria reflected the expectation that students are able to critically evaluate a complex patient situation to determine what information is needed from the assessment and how to conduct an accurate assessment on more complex patients (pp. 15). Faculty were allotted teaching credit for the development and implementation of the practicum - a crucial consideration for faculty investment (pp. 15). It was important to have full faculty involvement of development in order to facilitate buy-in. As a result, the authors noted that any attempt to develop this kind of standardization of evaluation with faculty be discussed openly in faculty meetings for each step of the development (pp. 18). Finally, consideration was taken for student anxiety. Although student's anxiety will always persist, it was recognized that early details provided on the evaluation criteria in addition to evaluation "run-throughs" created a sense of understanding and calm (pp.19). It can be seen, in this case, that faculty involvement is needed in order to create a sense of place and confidence for undergraduate students in their program.

Clive Beck and Clare Kosnik investigated the preservice practicum supervision scenario in which supervision is often carried out by special supervisory staff rather than by tenure or tenure track faculty. In an elementary preservice cohort program, the authors began a new approach which involved the entire faculty in practicum supervision (2002, pp. 10). The authors identified several reasons for the prior limited involvement of faculty supervision, the most obvious being time pressures on university faculty. In addition to preservice teaching, education professors typically have commitments to graduate teaching, thesis supervision, research, publishing, administration, and committee work. A second reason identified is that it is common for preservice work to not be as highly regarded as graduate work, research, and publishing. As a

result, faculty often give a lower priority to preservice course instruction; and practicum supervision. Finally, the authors understood the neglect of practicum supervision often resulted from the belief of many education professors that they make a greater contribution to schooling through research and theorizing (pp. 6). Nevertheless, with correct support, faculty involvement was found to strengthen the school-university partnership, enhance both the practicum and the campus program, and help faculty grow in knowledge and understanding (pp. 11-14). However, the approach was time-consuming and presented some other challenges for faculty (pp. 15). If it is to be adopted widely in preservice education, stronger institutional support was seen to be necessary (pp.17).

Lucki Kang of the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) National Field Education Committee Research presented to the Regina 2018 Annual General Meeting on the role of field education as the signature pedagogy of social work education. She strongly recommended those who direct field education be integrated and included into institutional committee structures, academic planning, curriculum and policy development, as well as pedagogical discussions (pp. 1). For Kang, field education is not a separate component of social work education and administrators are accountable to the students of the programs and the vulnerable client populations in the field (pp. 2). Students and community agencies in the field must share a deeper integration of the field into the classroom to help better prepare students for social work practice (pp. 2). As a result, some important questions are asked of field education involvement in leadership, governance and leadership that address workload and full school engagement (pp. 2).

### 3.3 THEORY TO PRACTICE

Although relating theory to practice will vary from school to school, there are institutional constants which are shared broadly. Donald Schön outlines the twofold relationship to the worlds of the practice and the larger university which is also mirrored in the relationship of discipline and practice-oriented components of the school.

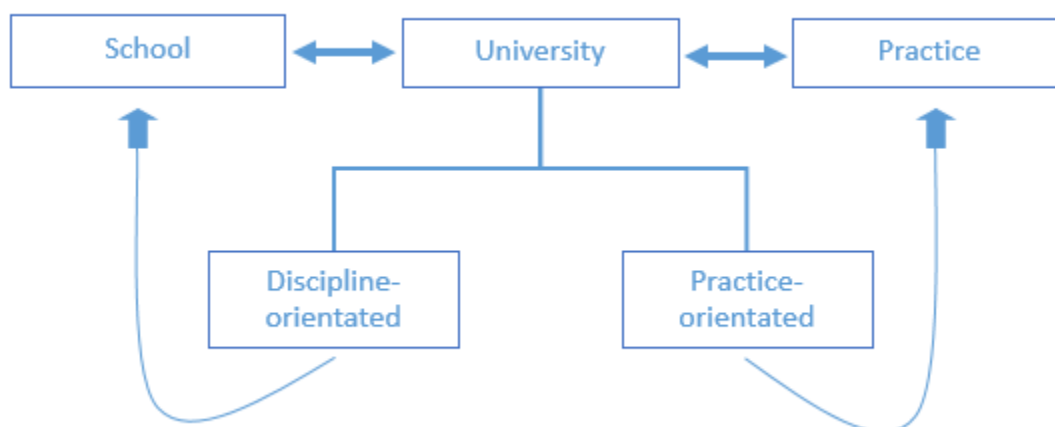


Figure 3: Relationship between practice the larger university (Schön, 1987, pp. 306)

A common critique of the professional school and of the practicum component within the professional schools themselves raised by Schön in that the professional aspect of the school is

seen as a lower priority and a less valued part of the curriculum. Within a professional school, there are those sensitive mainly to the theory and critique of the disciplines and those who lean to the demands of the practice world; and the two groups tend to be isolated from, or at war with, each other (Schön, 1987, p. 307). Practicum must be built directly upon and research and teaching in addition to this theory informed by its partner of current practice. As a result, Schön designs a coherent professional school in which he places a reflective practicum at the center in order to bridge the two worlds of university and practice (Schön, 1987, p. 309). This results in a link to disciplines like organizational theory, social psychology, psychology of motivation, or theories of internal and external market behavior and students are able to gain a different way of looking about the theories offered by the researchers as they experience the realities of their own knowledge and those in the practicum. As a result, Schön feels students are able to

*trust their own capacity to make decisions, to be able to answer not only "What would you do in this situation?" but "By what particular interventions would you try to make your recommended actions effective in this organization?" (Schön, 1987, p. 325).*

When looking at the practicum experience and its connection to theory, the University of Saskatchewan undertook a program renewal in order to better fuse the field experiences and theory components to "create more powerful teaching-learning communities within partnership relationships" (Lemisko & Ward, 2010, p. 55). One of the benefits of the professional school is their education serves as a direct preparation for the work place and as a result, emerging trends can be placed into the learning to create a more responsive education. This is what is termed "situated learning" and focuses on the idea that learning occurs in particular contexts and is best studied in action and use (Lemisko & Ward, 2010, p. 55). As a result, disconnect between faculty involvement and the practicum has led to misunderstandings of the profession, dissatisfaction with the practicum experience and a lack of preparation for the workplace culture. More faculty collaboration also led the institution's teacher candidates to feel a sense of community (Lemisko & Ward, 2010, p. 62). In addition, the faculty participation led to a reflection on their own research and practice and how to connect their courses to real-world settings. This acted as a reminder of their responsibility toward all stakeholders - students, colleagues, partner schools, children and youth (Lemisko & Ward, 2010, p. 63). Nevertheless, increased participation with partners has its challenges. Lemisko and Ward point out that although the rewards for students are clear, placement partners need more incentive to learn what is required and how to communicate with academia. The authors go so far as to suggest better understanding and action between the partners and faculty may be to develop the idea of *praxis* within the curriculum. This would mark the practicum as a more intellectually respectable endeavor to university academicians and more teacher's engagement in the co-generation of knowledge (Lemisko & Ward, 2010, p.64).

### **3.4 MENTORSHIP**

The professional Nursing practicum has a preceptor/student relationship which provides a solid, supportive learning environment during the clinical experience and allows for an enriched evaluation experience. Mentoring students is considered a long-term relationship between a novice nurse practitioner and a willing committed expert who promotes career development and transition to advanced practice (Hayes, 2000, p. 118). The dominant model of clinical education is outlined by Hayes as the action of precepting; a relationship between the student and a skilled

practitioner or faculty member who supervises students in a clinical setting to allow experience with patients. Hayes' study showed students developed long-lasting rapport with mentoring preceptors which better prepared students for their workplace experience as well as expectations, issues and frustrations during the practice (Hayes, 2000, p. 120).

Kwan and Lopez-Real (2006) examined the role of mentors in student teacher education. The authors define mentoring as a process which helps student teachers become professional teachers (pp. 275). The study of a large-scale school partnership evaluative project in Hong Kong revealed how mentors perceived their roles during the mentoring process and how these roles have changed over time (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2006, p.275). Awaya, McEwan, Heyler, Linsky, Lum and Wakukawa define mentoring within teacher education as a journey in which the mentor guides the student teacher's work in the field in a relationship rather than a set of bound duties (2003, p.46). As a result, a mentor's role is to support the teacher candidate during the field education experience and as a result contribute to a "community of practice" development (Wenger, 1999, p.85). As a result, focusing on the evaluative end result is not optimum for a learning partnership. Kwan and Lopez-Real revealed the importance of a mentor to be the "provider of feedback" and represents an emphasis on the provision of real-world advice given in order to develop the skills required of beginning teachers (p. 285). This can be a troublesome scenario if the framework expected of a supervisor is to both mentor and evaluation practicum students in the field.

### **3.5 COMMUNICATION**

According to Kellah Edens, the principle aim of practicums in teacher education programs is the development of reflective teacher candidates who understand the complexities and implications of on-going decision making (Edens, 2012, p. 14). Effective communication such as dynamic conversations among school and university-based faculty and teacher education students is fundamental to an effective field-based experience. Communication reduces misconceptions and facilitates the redefinition of the subjective realities of the school culture (Edens, 2012, p. 15). Edens looked to online discussion groups as a solution to the large-scale management of placements in which peer communication in addition to faculty feedback was required for practicum development. Topics ranged from social emotional issues with students to teaching as a profession and ethical issues pertaining to teaching (Edens, 2012, p. 19). However, online discussion is not always the best way to conduct meaningful conversation. This was identified in several technical issues and student participation obstacles which led to withdrawal or venting (Edens, 2012, p. 20). Although peer communication is important, open communication must be stimulated among practicum coordinators, community mentors and faculty instructors as well.

Allsop, DeMarie, Alvarez and Doone acknowledge the time-consuming effort to develop and sustain professional development schools in promoting professional responsibility (2006, p. 19). Nevertheless, a long-standing goal for many teacher preparation programs is to link theory to practice for teacher candidates through close university partnerships. In this study, a partnership was made between a particular cohort and an elementary school. This partnership had two explicit goals, to develop a partnership in order to link theory learned to practice and also to collect data to evaluate this linkage goals (Allsop, DeMarie, Alvarez & Doone, 2006, p. 21). A steering committee made of school administration, teachers, university administration and faculty were created in order to increase communication on the success of this research. Notably more participation was necessary. As an example, one tenured faculty member serving as the

overall practicum coordinator on site for one and one-half days a week (Allsop, DeMarie, Alvarez & Doone, 2006, p. 23). The results showed that increased linkages were made and that close collaboration among instructors provided a learning environment that allowed for a smooth transition for students as they moved from university to the classroom (Allsop, DeMarie, Alvarez & Doone, 2006, p. 30). As well, instructors were able to make linkages from the classroom into their teaching to further enhance the curriculum (Allsop, DeMarie, Alvarez & Doone, 2006, p. 31). Less emphasis was made on the input by teacher candidates to instructors or school teacher mentors which would have strengthened communication and linkage.

### **3.6 PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE TRAINING**

Hatcher, Wise and Grus note the importance of the practicum to training in professional psychology. Increased attention is now focused on ensuring the quality of practicum and its integration with academic training (2015, p. 5). A critical issue identified is how doctoral programs prepare students for their first formal practicum placement. This research looked at the required academic and clinical skills training and its timing in relation to the start of practicum and indicated their methods for assessing and assuring students' readiness for practicum. This study examined details of practicum preparation and identified a set of core, practicum-related courses or course content commonly taught either before practicum begins, overlapping with practicum, or exclusively during practicum (Hatcher, Wise & Grus, 2015, p. 8). This is useful in identifying the correct timing for practicum preparation but does not touch on the content of professionalism training for areas with younger students such as undergraduate professional practicum programs. Nevertheless, the expectation of programs to evaluate for readiness was interesting in that the authors found it more common for this assessment to be made with counselling programs than clinical programs (Hatcher, Wise & Grus, 2015, p. 9). The success of a student's practicum was possible to predict with the successful completion of pre-clinical professional coursework. As a result, this competence assessment is crucial. When difficulties arose, repetition of coursework, a lesser load during practicum and/or increased supervision was recommended (Hatcher, Wise & Grus, 2015, p. 10).

Once more in the health sector, researchers Karimi, Ashktorab, Mohammadi and Ali Abedi found professionalism pre-training in nursing was critical for creating credibility and a positive image (2014, para. 1). The study aimed to explain using the hidden curriculum to teach professionalism in nursing undergraduates in Iran (Karimi, Ashktorab, Mohammadi & Ali Abedi, 2014, para. 2). On example found participants who underwent what the authors labeled "hidden curriculum" developed an ethics of patience, humility and altruism; noting that once professionalism was understood, the student was able to become an authority of themselves and enter into the hospital environment out of the university campus with more patience, especially with difficult patients (Karimi, Ashktorab, Mohammadi & Ali Abedi, 2014, para. 14). Thus, the hidden curriculum displayed by practicum nursing staff, patients, physicians, and peers through observational learning and feedback is seen as extremely valuable. Consequently, because of the importance of the hidden curriculum in learning the nursing professionalism, specifying the hidden factors and presenting them in the explicit curriculum can prevent the hidden curriculum from residing in the black box (Karimi, Ashktorab, Mohammadi & Ali Abedi, 2014, para. 26),

### **3.7 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review has brought attention several issues surrounding practicum preparation, connection to theory, mentorship philosophy and the roles of responsibilities of all parties in the practicum training process. The history of field education is useful in giving perspective to the development of practicum learning while the research in connecting theory to practice underlies the reasons for the field education format. As a result, understanding roles and responsibilities of those involved in learning, placements and evaluation are crucial in examining underlying philosophy and engagement methods not only among students but also within the community. Communication is recognized as a key component of the practicum component not only in student to instructor relationships but also among agencies and peer to peer. Finally, the need for professional training and clear expectations is examined to understand how to handle situations in which students are not ready for practicum and the need for a flexible solution in which to prepare a student for field work.

## 4 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

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### 4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research design employs a gap or needs analysis along with a smart practices study using a grounded theory approach to the practicum component of professional undergraduate programs. As the scope of the study was limited to practicum programs in post-secondary professional undergraduate institutions with ombuds office support, the research was completed on a relatively small scale. The survey and interviews were open-ended and unstructured with the intention to leave the possibility for responses to the formulate theories through the resulting observations (Denscombe, 2010, p. 111).

This assessment model asked practicum coordinators to identify the current and desired status of practicum program administration. The participatory model was meant to ensure the coordinators affected would illuminate the context of the issues and assign appropriate priority to the needs of practicum assessment challenges. Participatory evaluation is “applied social research that involves trained evaluation personnel (or research specialists) and practice-based decision makers working in partnership” (Cousins & Earl, 1995, p. 8). The reported benefits of participatory evaluation include clarification of program objectives, support for specific decisions, increased stakeholder belief in the credibility of the evaluation, greater understanding of identified concepts, ownership of final results, and respect for the diversity of perspectives (Preskill, Zukerman, & Matthews, 2003).

The current state of the practicum process leads many students to arrive unprepared or unsupported during their field experience. It is important to understand the issues that arise and how they may be rectified so that there is more support for both practicum coordinators and students to improve the environment as students take their program theory into practice. Looking at supporting students in this process through the lens of the fairness triangle creates an objective way of ascertaining smart practices in future development for more transparent and engaged practicum participation. Examining program administration in this lens also displayed an objective lens with which to objectively assess process and procedure

The methodology for this project involved three separate components. First, a focus group consultation session with a senior administrator and ombudsperson was held to determine scope and refine the topic areas. As well the discussion was useful in guiding the formulation of questions for subsequent practicum coordinator consultation. The second part of the research involved a survey sent to 16 undergraduate professional practicum coordinators to determine placement, evaluation, assessment and appeal mechanisms as well as strengths and challenges of their current practice. The survey was comprised of 12 questions, encompassing what ombuds recognized as the pressing issues in relation to the practicum process for undergraduate students. The third section of the research used a personal interview with consenting participants gathered from the previous survey.

### 4.2 METHODOLOGY

Two distinct groups, senior administrators and practicum coordinators, were identified for this project. The objective of the consultations with senior administrators of professional schools was to obtain information on barriers and contributors in the practicum process. The consultations

with practicum coordinators from various institutions within British Columbia provided information about their current practicum practices and processes to provide guidance on the challenges and successes of practicum practice for UVic and other Canadian institutions.

#### ***4.2.1.1 Group 1 - Senior Administration:***

In consultation with the client, a list of administrators at the senior faculty level was developed to recruit participants for group one. The list was put together by reviewing associate dean positions in the professional school faculties at various BC institutions. Associate deans often deal with more extreme practicum issues and as a result, are well positioned to identify any sensitivities and focus areas in which to emphasize. The final group of participants included one associate dean from the University of Victoria in the faculty of Human and Social Development.

#### ***4.2.1.2 Group 2 – Practicum Coordinators:***

This group of stakeholders is actively involved in the practicum process to provide guidance and advice to students and clients as they navigate the practice component of the curriculum. The practicum coordinator works collaboratively with the teaching faculty to ensure an enriched, engaged, transparent and fulfilling practicum experience for their students. They were interviewed to explore the opportunities and barriers they have experienced in the practicum process. Their insights and perceptions are important in order to understand the opportunities and barriers to a successful student practicum experience. The final group of participants included 5 practicum coordinators from the survey and 4 participated in the interviews.

#### **4.2.2 Focus Group Discussion:**

To start, an ombuds representative from two different institutions within British Columbia (one from a university and the other from a community college) undertook to personally contact their senior administration to arrange a focus group discussion with the researcher and the rest of the ombuds office representatives from British Columbia. One senior administrative associate dean from a university was available. The discussion was informal and outlined the scope of the project with an agenda to cover any challenges or overarching themes that would be important to cover during the primary aspect of the research with practicum coordinators. The agenda was as follows:

1. Brief the senior administrator on the purpose of the meeting, events to date and proposed research methodology;
2. Address the questions:
  - a. What are the primary issues facing Deans and Associate Deans who have responsibility for Practicums in professional programs?
  - b. What information would be helpful to their understanding of the research?
  - c. What is the optimal approach to securing their support?
3. Summarize discussion and consider next steps; Prepare introduction protocol; Secure follow up feedback; Begin contact with institutional representatives.

As a result of the focus group discussion the decision was taken to concentrate on specific professional programs with ombuds offices within British Columbia post-secondary institutions.

### 4.2.3 Survey Methodology:

As part of the participant recruitment process, each ombudsperson received an introductory email letter that identified potential participants (Table 1) and provided an outline of the project using the project proposal as a guide (for an example of the communication, see Appendix B). The intention was to inform practicum coordinators about the full scope of the project and the stakeholders involved.

|                                       | <b>Child and Youth Care</b> | <b>Education</b>                                    | <b>Nursing</b>   | <b>Social Work</b>                     |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Camosun College</b>                | Practicum Coordinator       |   | Practice Placement Coordinator                           |  |
| <b>Simon Fraser University</b>        |                             | Student Placements Coordinator                      |  |  |
| <b>University of British Columbia</b> |                             | Secondary Practicum Placement Coordinator           | Practice Placement & Systems Officer                     | Chair of Field Education               |
|                                       |                             | Elementary & Middle Practicum Placement Coordinator |  | Field Education Coordinator (2)        |
| <b>UBC - Okanagan</b>                 |                             | School Experience Coordinator                       | Practice Placement Coordinator                           | Field Education Coordinator            |
|                                       |                             | Community Field Experience Coordinator              |  |  |
| <b>University of Victoria</b>         | Practicum Coordinator       | Placement Coordinator, Field Experience (2)         | Practica Coordinator, Undergraduate Education            | Indigenous Field Education Coordinator |
|                                       |                             |   | Practica Coordinator, Undergraduate Post Diploma Program | Field Education Coordinator (2)        |
| <b>Vancouver Community College</b>    |                             |   | Practice Education Coordinator                           |  |

*Table 2: Identified practicum coordinators of undergraduate professional programs in BC*

Following the introductory letter, the researcher contacted all potential participants individually to request participation in the survey. The survey was sent to 22 undergraduate professional practicum coordinators to determine placement, evaluation, assessment and appeal mechanisms as well as strengths and challenges of their current practice. A reminder email was sent to all potential participants one week later. There were eight respondents from the survey from both

universities and community colleges in the areas of Social Work, Nursing, Education and Child and Youth Care. As a result, each targeted area was represented in the survey with a 36% response rate. The practicum coordinators were invited to participate in a survey on their practicum policies and processes using Survey Monkey's Canadian data collection platform (Appendix C). In the survey email invitation, a consent form (Appendix D) was attached. At the end of the survey, participants were invited to discuss practicum challenges and successes in a follow-up interview.

#### **4.2.4 Interview Methodology:**

The third section of the research applied an open-ended, conversational interview with each consenting participant from the previously conducted survey. The final question of the survey asked for further participation in the form of an extended interview:

*Q13: You are invited to participate in a follow up interview to explore further ways and means of creating solid practicum experiences. If you are interested in participating, please include your contact details below.*

Each positive response from the survey was followed by an individual email to the practicum coordinator inviting the participant to either a recorded in-person interview or over the phone; depending on location and convenience of the participant. The interviews were made using the following criteria: ensuring a balance of university and community college level environments and ensuring a range of professional school environments. However, it was not the intention of these follow-up interviews to provide the basis for any quantitative statistical claims. Rather the purpose was to get a more detailed impression of how practicum coordinators articulate their perceptions of the practicums they facilitate.

The questions asked in the interviews were open-ended and conversational. The guided conversational and semi-structured nature of the interview in qualitative research involves asking relatively open-ended questions of participants to discover their interest and knowledge of the topic (Roulston, 2008, p. 128). Nevertheless, there were a series of overarching questions which were brought forward during the discussion (Appendix E). The open-ended style of questions was guided by appreciative inquiry to ascertain what was most importantly working well in the practicum process and what worked well in the practicum process and what, in their opinion, would make the process even more successful (Norum, 2008, p. 23).

### **4.3 DATA ANALYSIS**

Using the literature review, survey and interviews, an analysis was done through the recognition of patterns, themes and content analysis. This was done with an open-ended and exploratory inductive approach in order to draw conclusions for smart practices from the data collected by the participants (Dey, 2010, p. 261). The data drawn from the literature and survey results were examined and coded prior to conducting the interviews. After the interviews were completed, an examination of common themes and new concepts were collected across all three formats (Appendix F).

#### **4.3.1 Survey Analysis**

Once the survey was closed for participants, the researcher exported the responses from the Survey Monkey software into an excel spreadsheet and organized sheets according to the following trio of questions;

1. Main thematic question
2. Has this method been successful? or  
To what extent has this method met with your objectives?
3. Has this method posed any challenges?

The data was then coded according to key words in order to organize the responses. Therefore, the analysis was grounded in the collection according to the following four open-ended thematic questions:

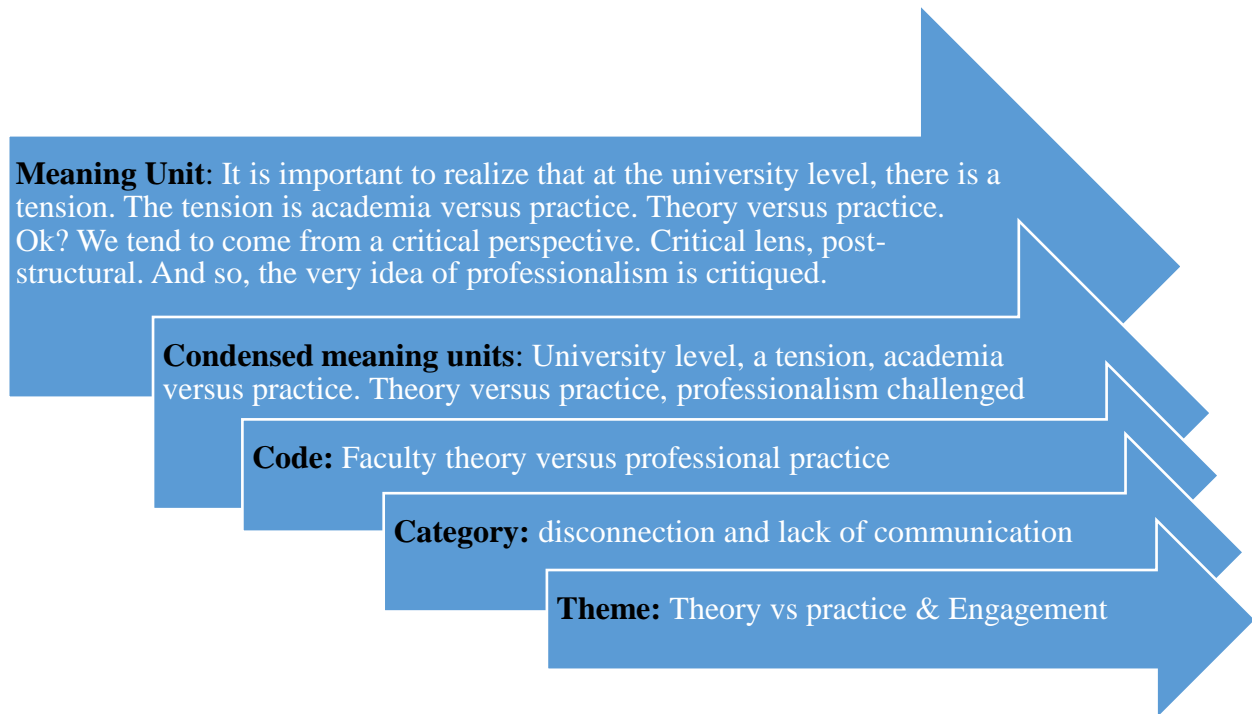
1. Placement: What information do you provide your practicum students to explain the purpose of the practicum placement and the procedures that will be involved?
2. Performance Assessment: What information is provided to your practicum students regarding how their performance will be assessed during their practicum?
3. Assessment Materials: What materials are provided to practicum students in terms of their assessment during their practicum?
4. Appeal: In the event the student disagrees with either the process or the assessment outcomes, what information is provided to them regarding entitlement and access to avenues of appeal?

#### **4.3.2 Interview Analysis**

After each interview was completed, the researcher transcribed the digital audio recordings. Key themes were identified keeping in mind the extent to which recurring ideas and smart practices were noted. Unique ideas, approaches or perspectives were important to make a note of for future research opportunities. While sorting and naming themes required some level of interpretation, the “interpretation” was kept to a minimum (Anderson, 2007, p. 1). Content analysis was conducted to systemically identify the themes and categories which emerged from the interview transcriptions (Erlingsen & Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 94). The following steps were taken to analyze the collected data:

1. The interviews were listened to, transcribed verbatim, and read several times in order to obtain the sense of emerging themes.
2. The text was divided into meaning units, then condensed.
3. The condensed meaning units were abstracted, and labeled with codes.
4. The codes were sorted into subcategories and categories based on their similarities and differences.
5. Finally, the themes were formulated as the expression of the latent content of the text.

The higher levels of generalisation reflected the interpreted, underlying meaning of the text without identifying comments with distracting information.



*Figure 5: Example of the research analysis leading to higher levels of abstraction*

The researcher noted the various themes identified in the literature were largely repeated in different ways throughout the survey and interviews. This was likely due to the common job descriptions of a practicum coordinator in undergraduate professional post-secondary institutions.

#### **4.4 PROJECT STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS AND RISKS**

The strengths of this project include the knowledge gathered through various methods of research; the focus group consultation, survey and interview. The consultation was open and inviting as the client was primarily focused on ensuring the research was done in a participatory manner, not evaluative. This would ensure more open participation and ensure buy-in for those who would be in a position to make any necessary smart-practice recommendation. Those who chose to participate in the survey and interview were interested and motivated in the outcome with many years of experience from which to draw. In particular, each interview participant had been a practicum coordinator in the field for more than 10 years. As a result, participants were well aware of the overarching system they worked within and knew its limitations and possibilities. They had established relationships with students and agencies over a long period of time and knew the consequences of a variety of initiatives and societal trends.

Both the survey and the interviews were purposely open-ended and largely unstructured to allow for a more exploratory framework in which the respondents could answer the question of challenges in practicum assessment. As the situation was not narrowly defined, practicum coordinators were able to share their successes and challenges in areas not initially anticipated such as equitable fairness extending to the calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015) or a scenario of teacher candidate

assessment completed via pupils in order to provide an important and often overlooked perspective.

The project was limited in scope in order to ensure a manageable time frame and focus on in-depth knowledge gathering among a specific set of stakeholders. The limited time frame and focus restricted the total number of surveys and interviews collected. Although the summer term is typically a period of less work for many administrative professionals as undergraduate students will take the time off of their studies, it is also a time when many coordinators will take advantage of the slower period and leave for extended vacation. As a result, although the focus and scope were narrow, many practicum coordinators asked for extra time to participate; more than what was possible within the given timeline. The limited number of respondents may not only constrain the breadth of the recommendations but may have introduced a possible bias.

An additional concern is the nature of the suggested critique; this could have dissuaded coordinators from participating as they were not willing to speak about challenges they may be responsible for or have no control over. A number of potential participants who had and had not completed the survey communicated their reluctance to the researcher stating a perception of their being unqualified to speak on their program's policies or process. Instead, it was primarily seasoned professionals with a longer history of the profession who were considered the best to tackle the subject matter. Alternatively, critiques could be found from participants who were disengaged or discouraged in their position. As a result, the responses from the participants could have had an ulterior motive specific to their personal "pet peeve". A limited number of respondents creates an atmosphere of uncertainty as to the objectivity of the results.

This project may also be affected by the researcher's role as an employee of the University of Victoria. This introduced not only a possibility for research bias, but it was also probably that this resulted in participants' lack of involvement or responses as more guarded. To mitigate this limitation, the project was limited to the area of undergraduate professional programs in which the researcher is not involved, and participants were assured that all responses were confidential and combined in aggregate with other responders. This was stated in each consent form and reiterated with the initial communication while setting up the interview and before each interview.

The conversational interview style is both a strength and a weakness. Although the approach may put the participant at ease and elicit more in-depth data for research, the researcher has the potential to guide the conversation in a way that may manipulate the data both during the interview and in transcription and coding (Roulston, 2008, p. 313). For instance, while in conversation with the participants a mention of previous interview topics that have arisen may colour the discussion and sway opinion in the ensuing conversation. As well, the transcription was often difficult to transcribe accurately as often the topic strayed and looped back to more relevant matters during the interview.

Finally, any risk and potential harm was reviewed by each post-secondary institution's Human Research Ethics Board which concluded that the project posed minimal risk to participants.

## **5 FINDINGS: CONSULTATION WITH FOCUS GROUP**

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The focus group consultation was intended to be a small, informal conversation with a senior administrator in order to discuss the subject of the research and any sensitivities that may occur from an investigation. It was important to the ombuds client that the project approach was created from a participatory rather than evaluative framework. This was to ensure practicum coordinators were involved as participants in the study and were not made to feel evaluated on issues in which they may not have control.

The consultation discussions also outlined the major themes of practicum challenges such as the academic instructor expectations, coordinator sensitivities, student readiness to enter workplace culture, and understanding the roles of each member in a practicum program.

### **Academic Responsibility**

Similar to the literature review and interviews, the discussion turned to academic expectations of the practicum and the role of the instructor. When instructors are teaching practice courses, it is important to incorporate the theory into the practical work to be accomplished during the practicum. Related issues that were identified included the expectations of academic faculty as they develop their courses and how to connect the theory to practice. The idea was explored as to whether it would be a good idea to interview both directors and practicum coordinators in order to get both perspectives. The senior administrator noted that although all practicums have similar characteristics, each institution may have different philosophies and adhere to different accreditation requirements. As a result, it would be important to ensure that the appropriate contact is identified. The researcher made note to conduct an online search of each program followed by a request to the respective ombuds office to look it over for accuracy.

### **Professional Preparation**

One of the biggest issues in practicum placement and assessment with community agencies is the ability for students to understand their role in the practicum. Often, students are not ready for the professional workplace culture. As a result, many issues and appeals occur due to students being ill prepared or mismatched to practicum placements. An investigation of smart practices in this area was seen as important. Suggestions to find methods that ensure students are well placed, that the experience is constantly assessed, and that agencies are aware of their role was made to ensure appeals were not necessary. Student's understanding of the jurisdiction of the appeal mechanism and how to navigate this area was identified as a problematic issue that occasionally arises in senior administrative offices.

### **Workload**

It was expected much of the information gathered would have to do with the workload that practicum coordinators have to contend with as they fulfill their placement and administrative duties. The researcher made a note to ensure that workload was a consideration during interviews to confirm the research was not a critique of inadequate performance.

### **Role of the Practicum Coordinator**

The senior administrator was wary of the difference in expectations between certificate and diploma programs and that of a degree program in a university. The concern was that more might be expected with a degree with a more extensive practicum program. As a result, a suggestion was made to only focus on major practicums in major institutions. It was also identified that a student's placement in their educational program will matter as 1st and 2nd year students have fewer expectations placed on their performance. As a result, the same four main undergraduate professional programs were placed in scope and the decision was taken to limit data collection to those institutions supported by ombudsperson offices.

Nevertheless, as ombudspersons work in both college and university settings, it was important to incorporate both types of post-secondary institutions. Most major degree programs are offered in universities and while colleges offer most of the diploma and certificate programs. As a result, when interviewing varying schools, the researcher kept in mind the advice given during this consultation.

The project's final scope was established at this juncture in order to ensure there was sufficient representation among institutions and ombuds offices in BC as well as allow for the expected completion timeline. As a result, the practicum programs for this research have similar practicum placement philosophies, assessment methods and overarching appeal governance structures yet have different institutional approaches to these processes. This meant the connection to the ombuds offices is established to each program in addition to the ombuds promotion of the fairness triangle.

Finally, there was a recognition that identifying research data would not be shared with the ombudsperson of the respective institution. As a result, this was reiterated with each interview.

In summary, the focus group consultation brought forward a recognition of workload and sensitivities around roles and responsibilities of the practicum coordinator. In terms of the practicum student, workplace preparation and differences among professional schools were noted as important considerations.

## 6 FINDINGS: CONSULTATION WITH PRACTICUM COORDINATORS

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### 6.1 SURVEY

The survey responses to the open-ended questions posed to the practicum coordinators were largely on focused on the most relevant issues identified by the client, researcher and the focus group consultation. The themes that emerged from the survey were found to be less associated with the interview results largely due to the more specific emphasis on procedural fairness and the dissemination of information and clarity of process within the practicum program.

#### **Placement:**

*What information do you provide your practicum students to explain the purpose of the practicum placement and the procedures that will be involved?*

The most common way respondents explain the practicum process is through an online format with seven out of the eight respondents mentioning a website of some kind. Some respondents indicated videos that were included in the website and one mentioned a professional blog created specifically for the practicum process. Two respondents identified the large number of distance students they served as the reason such a format was the most useful way to provide this information. The practice environment changes often and workload was the main issue in ensuring information is up to date. As well, many students prefer to contact a coordinator personally rather than look through a website – especially if the design is difficult to navigate.

The second most common answer to this question was a seminar. There were five respondents who stated that a seminar was provided but only one respondent identified this as a required credit course. In addition, two respondents mentioned the introduction of management systems for online learning and teaching. The traditional method of a paper handout has clearly been transformed to a dynamic and changing online format which requires more expertise and sustained upkeep than a paper format.

#### **Performance Assessment:**

*What information is provided to your practicum students regarding how their performance will be assessed during their practicum?*

There was more variation among answers to this question than there was to the first. Three out of the eight respondents mentioned that the evaluation form used in the assessment was provided to their students while four mentioned more face to face information in the form of learning outcome interviews, check-in meetings, or seminars. Two respondents mentioned extensive checklists which laid out the essential requirements for success such as accepting feedback and regulating emotions.

The accreditation standards of some programs stipulated the requirements for how performance would be assessed, and these respondents mentioned extensive syllabus outlines. As well, one respondent mentioned the importance of this information, not only to students but to newer faculty.

Finally, feedback timelines are utilized by two respondents which ensure students are aware of interim reports. If behavior, performance or skills are not meeting the learning outcomes, then clear strategies and steps for work towards meeting these are laid out.

Nevertheless, one respondent accurately judged that assessment in a professional setting is difficult.

*What is difficult to explain at all times is how assessment is conducted in a profession as subjective as teaching. The process itself might be well laid out, but that does not necessarily mean that the student will agree with the result (S5).*

What is clear is that the assessment information needs to be given to students well before the placement has started. A few respondents mentioned the difficulties with providing assessment measure immediately preceding or during the practicum experience. Feedback timelines and checklists, an admittedly newer concept, looked to have provide the most student success according to the respondents in this survey.

### **Assessment Materials**

*What materials are provided to practicum students in terms of their assessment during their practicum?*

Some respondents viewed this question as a repetition of the preceding question. This may be due to the fact that for those respondents, no information is provided to students prior to the practicum experience. Accordingly, they felt this question had already been asked and simply replied, "Same as above". Nevertheless, for others there was a definite difference in their answers.

Four out of the eight respondents mentioned a move to an electronic platform for communication of interim reports, cross-checks, and conclusion evaluations. In this way, program coordinators and faculty advisors are able to view evaluations in real time. Two respondents mentioned the integration of a student evaluation in the form of portfolios, and the student's own learning outcome assessment of themselves.

The challenges that were mentioned come in the form of the commitment of the field supervisors to complete evaluations in full. Two respondents found they must do multiple site visits to ask probing questions about the student's performance in order to be able to give proper feedback. As a result, the online platform is only as good as the student and field instructor who utilize it.

### **Appeal**

*In the event the student disagrees with either the process or the assessment outcomes, what information is provided to them regarding entitlement and access to avenues of appeal?*

The most common answer to this question was to establish a personal connection to the student during assessment in order to resolve any issues before they became a larger issue. Eight out of eight respondents mentioned the need for personal contact for students regardless of what information was provided to them previously. Nevertheless, four of the respondents stated they had very little experience with appeals. As a result, these answers were centred on the method of providing the information rather than the content of the information. The primary method of

providing this information was online while a few respondents also identified additional sources such as faculty instructor contacts, course syllabus and a seminar.

Of the four more fulsome answers, there was a large amount of information that ranged from the academic calendar and progression committee policies to the inclusion of the ombudsperson and the institution's accessibility centres. These were disseminated through online formats. One respondent mentioned the importance of establishing student expectations:

*Info sessions and practicum orientations really help to set student expectations up. They do understand that the requests and needs of community sites are important aspects for us to consider, as well as the readiness of the student to be in more challenging settings. The number 1 expectation for students is often that practicum is a gateway into a job they really want. We try to reframe this to be about building skills for the job they want (S5).*

Success is hard to measure for many respondents as appeals situations are quite often due to an environment of misunderstanding and disagreement. There was general agreement, when asked if their method met their objectives, that the main approach was to ensure students felt heard and to try to prevent issues from happening from the beginning of the program.

## **6.2 INTERVIEW**

The interviews with the practicum coordinators represented a more informal and exploratory way to discuss practicum success and challenges. They were asked to focus and elaborate on the role they play in the practicum process and what they feel are the most important factors in the process to create a solid practicum experience (Appendix E). As with the survey, the themes which emerged had a great deal of commonality with each program.

Special effort was taken to ensure respondents knew this was a participatory study and that none of the information was to be shared with the institution or client. All three participants interviewed had been in their role for more than 10 years and had extensive experience working as a practicum coordinator in their various programs.

### **Community Building and Relationships**

When discussing the coordinator's current success in their practicum program, relationship building was the primary element that came through during the conversation. These relationships were formed not only with students but with placement agencies and, in one circumstance, faculty. For one participant, it was these relationships which led to the success of the student in their practicum.

*What works really well is the close relationship with community partners. They are often telling me that the majority of the students, they are quite pleased with them. They have often said that our students are better prepared than students coming from other programs. So, they have much higher success with our students in the mentoring relationships within their agencies. They really feel well supported when anything is going a little bit sideways because of the close relationship they have with our faculty (J6)*

The inquiry regarding facilitation of a broader understanding of smart practices among institutions, revealed in one interview the concept of an advisory committee that included representatives from practicum coordination, faculty, students, field mentors, community

partners, and alumni. This integration of all views led to a more established understanding of each other's roles, the emerging issues in either research or the field, and the importance of celebrating successes and discussing challenges.

### **Coordinator Control and Faculty Collaboration**

As the discussion turned to the current challenges in the practicum program, there was a worry regarding the lack of control over the workload assigned or consultation in the program design. Although there may be quotas assigned for many for these programs according to different accreditation bodies, there was no consultation with the practicum coordinators as to where the students would need to be placed in the way of community need and the landscape of the work environment. For example, although there is a desperate need for Technical Education, Physics and French Immersion secondary education teachers, due to prerequisite requirements, the cohorts admitted very rarely specialize in these areas. Instead, there are a large number of English and Social Studies teacher candidates in an environment where there are very few placement areas and very few jobs after graduation.

The challenge that created the most discussion was very clearly the need for better faculty collaboration and integration of practice into the curriculum. This had to do with both community development as well as program advocacy at the institution's senior leadership level. One practicum coordinator suggested that a field director or some sort of faculty representative would be vital for success. This position would be engaged in research and advocacy and would connect the two areas of the program.

Another coordinator in an institution with more integrated field involvement reported practice advocacy not only in research, but in funding and curriculum philosophy. This emphasis of incorporating theory into practice was not only a matter of greater faculty involvement, but also student preparation for the practicum.

*This way you get professional practice in an initial course, but it could be weaved throughout too. It could be to tie it together, what could we do to tie... because I worry sometimes it's too, when it is so academic, it's sometimes too idealistic? So, student get in the field and think it's only the system, I'm going to be different, I'm going to... and then they will find out (M1).*

Respondents expressed concern that the vast majority of faculty members do not consider the practicum process as a high priority. This fact is also evidenced in the literature review that indicated many faculty members are openly opposed to the role of practicum advisor or instructor being faculty.

*I've always took it as that the issue is that there are so many avenues in Education and I often err in that I assume that all these pathways lead through teaching and so many of them have nothing to do with teaching. As I've gotten older, I realize, okay, that's the reason why. Still does bother me, that there isn't a greater emphasis in this faculty for people to be involved in the teacher education program? Yes. But nonetheless that's not the case so as a result, and I don't mind this at all, the vast majority of my faculty advisors will be hired on either as seconded teachers or they are retired administrators or retired teachers who want to keep a foot in the door in the profession and they'll be*

*hired on and do my supervision for me. There is a small number of sessional instructors out here and they tend to be the ones involved in the Teacher Ed program and will also do a component of their workload supervising and then there is a very, very small number of faculty members (J1).*

An additional comment from the field of Social work:

*It becomes so frustrating as a coordinator because, you know, I've even asked about it, and someone told me, a prof, from TRU said, it's because they don't see themselves as practitioners, as social workers, so they don't have that pride in the profession. And their whole mandate is to critique (M1).*

### **Program Flexibility**

Professional programs serve a wide variety of students. The students come from a variety of backgrounds, are engaged in both distance and on campus study, are self-funded or dependent on student loans, and have various understandings of workplace culture.

All three interviews described a scenario where flexibility was championed. This touched on both procedure and community relationships as students may need extra time to finish a placement with an agency, and greater understanding around unconventional assessments to align with communication needs. This recognition is important as one particular program begins to understand how they can incorporate the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action into their curriculum planning and administrative policies (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015).

The resolve of an institution to handle everything on a set of prescribed terms or semesters, according to the deadline for grades or convocation, can be restrictive for many students. As this particular coordinator looked to indigenize their program, this was found as one of the biggest challenges but also a way to have the most positive experience for students. For example, the ability to stretch out practicums and give an opportunity to further develop a student's learning would provide students with a way to give back to their placements. This built on feelings of student advocacy and a sense of accomplishment in that this was not merely an academic requirement but a relationship built with community in this agency, centre, or school.

### **Practicum Placement**

One area in which flexibility was identified was through practicum placement. However, it was not only flexibility that was needed, but an understanding of relational fairness. The practicum process is the source of many appeals – both in the practicum placement decision as well as an understanding of workforce culture. For one participant, everything has been well-laid out in an extensive and thoughtfully designed website. This was done to ensure students understood exactly how a placement would be considered, how to request accessibility accommodation, and how the accreditation board was a factor in the decision.

Alternatively, for another interviewer this was not a consideration as the practicum placement philosophy is student-led. This was likely done to appease student requests while also handling the growing volumes of placements. This second scenario was in direct contrast to the third interviewer whose program's philosophy was opposed to the student led placement process:

*One, it's a missed opportunity to build a connection with the community from the college and two, the bigger one is that it really privileges specific students. So, when programs rely on students to find their own placements it really goes against all of our philosophy around social justice around inclusive practice and fairness and ethics because the student may have an anxiety, have English as a second language, an international student, not from this community, they are all already disadvantaged and then you are disadvantaging them again because they don't have the connections. Students without vehicles also don't have the opportunities, students who are single parenting or have any kind of accessibility issues are also disadvantaged. So right away, the students who are strong and confident will get the strong and confident placements, so we are perpetuating the inequities within the systems so by having the practicum placement coordinating it, we are able to balance that a little bit better and also really find what are the areas different students need in their growth (J6).*

### **Mentorship and Assessment**

Finally, agency supervision was identified in one interview as one of the most important factors in the process of creating a solid practicum experience. For one coordinator, the act of supervision on site must be separated from evaluation. As a result, the term “mentorship” was used in order to communicate to agencies that this was a relationship of growth rather than judgement.

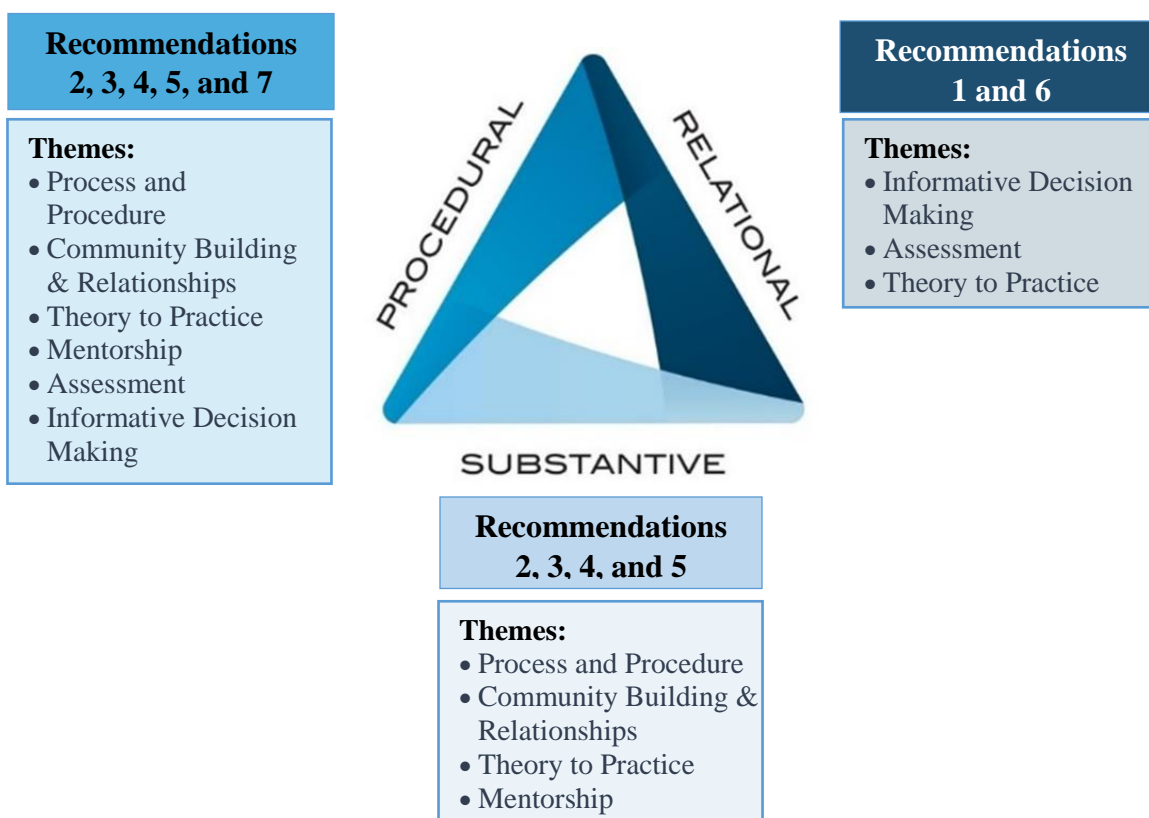
*Taking the pressure off people in the community to evaluate students but rather to support them in their learning and allow the instructors to evaluate. To allow a truer mentoring relationship because in essence you can't mentor if you are evaluating. So that's a big push is how do we help people in the field let go of the idea that it's hierarchical and supervisory other than make sure the policies are being followed but that its really all about meeting the student where they are at and building their practice (J6).*

This factor was not mentioned in the other interviews other than the need to constantly monitor practicum supervisors and even go so far as probe them for evaluation material in which the coordinator would fill out on their behalf. This was due to the recognition of the workload agencies are under. The coordinator is willing to evaluate students on behalf of the supervisor in order to maintain a positive relationship and ensure the agency will be willing to take on more practicum students in the future. The issue with these two scenarios is that in the first instance, students are aware of the relationship with the mentor and can act accordingly whereas in the second, students must rely on the interpretation of facts from one party to the other.

## 7 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

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The combination of the literature review, survey and interviews have arrived at several identifiable themes that need to be addressed in order to provide students with a practicum experience that considers the ombudsperson triangle of fairness. These themes were identified throughout all three forms of data and laid out in a table in order to see how concepts overlapped and differed (Appendix F). The identified themes were then related to the triangle of fairness in order to see where each concept would lie in the framework.



Through the research, it became clear that although set policy and procedure should be explicitly laid out in a clear and accessible manner, there is a larger issue at stake; the need to feel a sense of belonging. It is important that students are grounded in their programs, and they understand the underlying philosophy of the credential they have received. This means that as a professional program with a central practicum component required for graduation, there is a pedagogical connection between the theory learned in the classroom and the practice in the field.

Understandably, this disconnect is cited as the largest concern for two of the practicum coordinators interviewed whereas the third, who experienced integration at all levels presented an environment of purpose and direction. In fact, this third coordinator was more prepared to tackle issues of diversity and equitable practices while other programs were mired in internal advocacy regarding workload, funding, and curriculum.

A strong relationship with the student means routine seminars regarding the practicum in a safe and supported environment where expectations are clear – be that in the form of a website, a checklist, or a syllabus. Online communication platforms would handle this kind of seminar and discussion for distance students. Nevertheless, a focus on how to find a sense of place, how to connect with the program’s philosophy, and how to connect with the people who are teaching and mentoring the students are vital.

### **Procedural Fairness**

The elements of procedural fairness come into play with clear and easily available information. Approachability and a respect for confidentiality are most easily established via formal written policies and procedures to ensure consistency and sustainability for the practicum experience. These policies and procedures can include the purpose of the practicum for the professional school; curriculum objectives; details on the practicum administration and accountability; roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders (faculty liaisons, work place supervisors, students); information on admission criteria and evaluation methods; details on alternative ways to satisfy requirements; and appeal resolution procedures. They can be in the form of websites or online teaching platforms but it has been shown through this research that this information will not replace a concerned student’s need for a human face or voice. As a result, the availability of practicum coordinators and field instructors as well as well-informed agency supervisors, or mentors, are invaluable when ensuring a sense of procedural fairness.

### **Relational Fairness**

Building relationships - not only with the students but also with the community and teaching faculty is the conclusion arrived at within the relational or equitable factor. In essence, an environment of respect must be built to ensure there are avenues for solid communication, informed decisions, and reliable connections from the classroom to the field and from the field to the classroom. This also means meeting students where they are and as one coordinator stated, “walking alongside them in the learning process” (J6). Equitable practice is also a part of the indigenization of the practicum process, an important priority for every education institution in Canada. As a result, flexibility of procedural roles and ways of learning that are more inclusive, teaching skills of reconciliation and thinking about impacts of residential schools are important as practicum students move out to the field.

### **Substantive Fairness**

Having the appropriate authority to determine fairness based on relevant information in a reasonable manner in assessments and/or appeals is the crux of substantive fairness. The advisory committee made of various members of the practicum community would be an informative and inclusionary committee able to consult on matters regarding the students’ practicum experience. Greater perspective would be gained within the practicum experience and discussion topics would inform committee members on issues which may be developing a pattern. This would be useful in incorporating change and coax buy-in among the variety of stakeholders throughout the program.

## 8 RECOMMENDATIONS

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The research question, “What professional practicum practices are effective in improving understanding and fairness for university staff, students and mentors?” resulted in seven recommendations to improve practicum outcomes for undergraduate post-secondary students who are undergoing a practicum placement and assessment.

**Recommendation 1 - Begin collecting and utilizing aggregate data to inform and review existing policies and practices in the areas of practicum placement, assessment and appeal.**

Diligent recording and monitoring of practicum placement issues and appeals would help coordinators identify emerging trends and recurring difficulties in determining necessary placement, employment or assessment modifications and improvements. An annual report to summarize this data would be useful for development of process and policy improvements.

**Recommendation 2 - Develop and implement an accessible formal policy and procedure handbook that includes rules and regulations, including appeal mechanisms for incoming practicum students.**

Placement, assessment, and appeal expectations should be addressed early on. Development of written handbooks and online guidelines will be helpful in ensuring students are fully aware of the pedagogical and behavioral expectations of both the evaluation as well as the duties and responsibilities as a representative of the program and institution.

**Recommendation 3 – Celebrate and cultivate the mentorship role within placement agencies, schools and hospitals through the development of a package to inform mentors about the practicum process, and the roles and responsibilities of mentorship in addition to recognizing their importance to the student practicum process.**

The package should provide information about the practicum process, including what academic work is, or is not required; the school’s philosophy of mentorship; the roles and responsibilities of the practicum student and the institution; and internal resources and supports available. This information can be shared during the establishment of the first relationship as an introductory process but should be repeated annually. This information would help to reinforce the importance of this placement opportunity and the sincere appreciation for the mentorship opportunity the placement site is providing.

**Recommendation 4 - Develop a specific online or in-class course to impart skills of professional expectation and workplace culture for practicum students.**

The course should provide information about the expectations of the profession, including what is expected in the specific placement; the roles and responsibilities of the practicum student as a representative of the program, union considerations (if applicable); and workplace culture in the placement setting. This learning opportunity should be required and assessed before the establishment of the first placement.

**Recommendation 5 – Create an advisory committee consisting of practicum or field-experience coordinators, faculty, students, field mentors, community partners, and alumni to support and connect the various components of the practicum community.**

The community involved in developing the practicum policy should be aware of emerging issues and how all parties can contribute to solving or celebrating these matters. Information about available resources and how to access them are also important in discussions about possible

solutions to issues that arise. Coordinators as well as agencies, students and alumni should be empowered to provide their perspective to the professional program. Specialized training on mental health or indigenization should be considered for these committees.

**Recommendation 6 - Encompass faculty, instructors, mentors, and practicum coordinators in the process of program curriculum review where appropriate.**

Faculty involvement in the practicum process is crucial to student engagement and theory to practice curriculum development. Ongoing understanding of the practicum assessment and its place in the curriculum would enable students to understand their place in the program during the field education component.

**Recommendation 7 – The need for equity in the placement, assessment and appeal process, highlight the calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to indigenize professional programs and bring this teaching into communities.**

Equity does not mean equality. Meeting students where they are rather than where an institution needs them to be creates more equitable learning opportunities and encourages diversity in the professional programs. Placements that privilege well connected students or practicums that cut short a placement that may need to go beyond the term need to be reviewed in order to ensure students are given the necessary consideration and support.

## 9 CONCLUSION

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The purpose of this project is to develop a smart practice guide for undergraduate professional practicum programs in relation to the ombud's fairness triangle. This includes identifying principles to follow while addressing challenges in order to navigate the principles of relational, procedural and substantive fairness. Responding to this challenge required a review of the literature to gather existing and emerging knowledge and practices in field education, a survey to investigate the successes and challenges of practicum assessment, and in-person interviews with practicum coordinators to ensure there were no issues yet to be unidentified.

The findings from the literature review, survey, and the interviews were complementary. In many instances however, the survey has a greater emphasis on the realities of the day to day communication issues compared to the ideological and theoretical challenges and successes identified in the literature and interviews. The findings outlined opportunities for the practicum to improve communication and develop a sense of belonging within the hierarchy of the practicum. Resources and workload constraints appeared to be more of an underlying subject matter.

Hopefully, the recommendations will contribute to greater understanding where students feel supported and respected. From the university's perspective, an effective practicum program will lead to greater efficiency that can be redirected to other important initiatives. The report is intended to be used by the Association of Canadian College and university Ombudspersons and various practicum programs across BC as a resource to establish a smart practice guide, provide direction for future practicum program material and address issues in existing programs as they arise.

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# 11 APPENDIX

## 11.1 APPENDIX A: ADMINISTRATIVE FAIRNESS CHECKLIST FOR DECISIONS MAKERS

Table I – Prior to Decision Being Made

| Fairness Standard   |  |                                      |   |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>The individual affected is aware of:</b>   | <b>When Advised?</b>   | <b>By Whom?</b>                      | <b>How?</b>                               |
| The fact that a decision will be made   |  |                                      |   |
| Why a decision is necessary   |  |                                      |   |
| How the decision will affect the student  |  |                                      |   |
| The information that will be considered and any specific criteria to be used in making the decision                   |  |                                      |   |
| The current rules that will be used in arriving at a decision   |  |                                      |   |
| <b>Has the individual who is affected by the decision been provided with:</b>   | <b>How was the opportunity provided e.g., meeting, written submission?</b> | <b>Who provided the opportunity?</b> | <b>When was the opportunity provided?</b> |
| The opportunity to present their point of view on the matter  |  |                                      |   |
| The opportunity to respond to the information presented by the others which will be considered by the decision maker. |  |                                      |   |

Table II – While the Decision is Being Made

| <b>Fairness Standard</b>  | <b>Yes</b> | <b>If “no,”</b> |
|---|------------|-----------------|
| Has an adequate & proper review of all relevant information been conducted i.e., have all important facts been obtained, documented and considered before the decision is made? |            |                 |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Has the decision been reached objectively, with due respect for relevant facts, and without bias?   |  |  |
| Has accommodation been made for new and/or changed circumstances during a period of delay or while the decision is being made?  |  |  |
| Has care been taken to require and use only that information which is relevant to the decision?   |  |  |
| Has the decision been made in a manner which is consistent with previous decisions on similar matters, by relying on existing policies, guidelines, procedures and rules? |  |  |
| If discretion is exercised, can any inconsistency with previous decisions on similar matters be justified and explained?  |  |  |

Table III – After the Decision has Been Made

| <b>Fairness Standard</b>  | <b>Yes</b> | <b>If “no,”</b> |
|---|------------|-----------------|
| Have adequate reasons been provided to explain how and why the decision was made?                           |            |                 |
| Has the decision been written in plain language?  |            |                 |
| Has the decision been provided to anyone personally affected?   |            |                 |
| Has a proper record of the process used been kept and will it kept on file for a reasonable period of time? |            |                 |

(Assembled by Nora Farrell, Ombudsperson, Ryerson University, November 2002)

## **11.2 APPENDIX B – OMBUDSPERSON INTRODUCTORY EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS**

Hello,

I am writing to you today as I am working with Ada Saab, a graduate student in the School of Public Administration here at UVic. As the Interim Ombudsperson at this institution, I would like to introduce you to her research project looking into how the ombuds model of fairness can be used to develop smart practices in professional practicum programs. I attach a participant consent form which provides further details of her research project.

Ada will be seeking feedback from lead administrators from practicum programs in Nursing, Education, Child & Youth Care, and Social Work across post-secondary institutions in BC. As Ada will be working within a participatory research framework, she will not be evaluating practicum programs but will be endeavoring to hear the perspectives/insights from those who administer these programs in order to combine all challenges and successes into one document from which everyone can learn.

Ada will be in touch with you shortly to inquire as to your interest and availability to participate in this project. I hope you will be involved as your expertise and experience will help to collaboratively create a smart practices document to support our respective roles and functions on campus. If you feel that there may be others in your academic area who might also be interested, please feel free to share this email with these people. If anyone else is added to this study, please email Ada directly at [asaab@uvic.ca](mailto:asaab@uvic.ca) so that she can include them in the survey.

Thank you for considering Ada's request.

Best regards,

### 11.3 APPENDIX C – SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1

What information do you provide your practicum students to explain the purpose of the practicum placement and the procedures that will be involved?

Q2

Has this method posed any challenges?

Q3

To what extent has this method met with your objectives?

---

Q4

What information is provided to your practicum students regarding how their performance will be assessed during their practicum?

Q5

Has this method posed any challenges?

Q6

To what extent has this method met your objectives?

---

Q7

What materials are provided to practicum students in terms of their assessment during their practicum?

Q8

Has this method been successful?

Q9

Has this method posed any challenges?

---

Q10

In the event the student disagrees with either the process or the assessment outcomes, what information is provided to them regarding entitlement and access to avenues of appeal?

Q11

Has this method been successful?

Q12

To what extent has this method met your objectives?

---

Q13

You are invited to participate in a follow up interview to explore further ways and means of creating solid practicum experiences. If you are interested in participating, please include your contact details below.

## 11.4 APPENDIX D – SURVEY CONSENT FORM



Human and Social Development | Public Administration  
Human & Social Development, Room A302, PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2  
Canada  
T 250-721-8055 | F 250-721-8849 | asaab@uvic.ca |

### Participant Consent Form

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#### **Smart Practices in the Undergraduate Practicum Programs of Nursing, Social Work, Child and Youth Care, and Education.**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Practicum Smart Practices* which will be conducted by Ada Saab, Master's student in the school of Public Administration at the University of Victoria. You may contact her if you have further questions by emailing her at asaab@uvic.ca.

As a graduate student, this research forms part of the requirements for a degree in Public Administration. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Norman Dolan and Dr. Kimberly Speers. You may contact Dr. Norman Dolan at njdolan@uvic.ca.

The project sponsor is Shirley Nakata (shirley.nakata@ubc.ca), the Ombudsperson at the University of British Columbia. She is the representative of the ombuds offices within BC who are a part of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO), and who have has raised this as a common issue among post-secondary institutions. As a result, the scope has been limited to those post-secondary intuitions with corresponding ombuds representatives among the administration.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research project is to examine the concept of fairness within the three sides of the Fairness Triangle – relational, procedural and substantive – and how this affects the students and programs who participate in undergraduate professional practicums. The analysis will inform the development of recommendations for smart practice in fairly evaluating performance currently occurring in post-secondary programs across British Columbia.

It is important to set clear expectations of professional conduct and ethics as well as an understanding of the characteristics of assessment during a practicum, what avenues will be followed when expectations are not met, and what appeal mechanisms are open to a student before any consequences are assigned. As post-secondary institutions move toward the integration of experimental learning into the general curriculum, programs will be better served if gaps are identified and smart practices are established.

#### **Importance of this Research**

Research of this type is important because student inquiries, concerns and/or complaints regarding practicum placements are raised with many postsecondary ombuds offices across Canada. Although many programs have guidelines to follow, others may benefit from more robust method of communicating the policies for practicum students and their assessors. Some of the typical concerns that have arisen include:

- dissatisfaction with the student selection process for placements,
- perceptions of bias and/or abuse of power by field supervisors and/or other employees in placement facilities,
- dissatisfaction with the evaluation process during the practicum assessment
- limited opportunity for appeal
- unsupported issues with field placements,
- a lack of specific policies and/or arbitrary/inconsistent application of policies, and
- a lack of awareness of specific protocol for specific placements.

### **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a leading administrator of an undergraduate practicum program with expert insight into the challenges and achievements which have occurred in your post-secondary institution. This study is confined to the group of BC post-secondary institutions with ombuds offices and you have been recommended by your ombudsperson as having this experience and knowledge. If you feel there are others who have this valuable insight in addition or instead of yourself, please do not hesitate to inform me.

### **What is involved?**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include the completion of a short web survey that will be hosted in Canada. The survey will ask about your opinion on practicum placement, assessment and appeal mechanisms from your institution's perspective. After the survey, you will be asked to participate in an interview in which, with your permission, audio tapes and written notes will be taken and a transcript will be made. This is a participatory research project in which your input is extremely valuable. The objective is to create a smart practices guide for all practicum programs which will incorporate your expert knowledge and perspective of the challenges and victories for other institutions to draw upon.

### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you. The time it will take for you to complete the survey and book time for the interview may take approximately 2 hours in total. As this project is based on participatory research, your input is vital. It is my hope that the resulting smart practices document created out from your knowledge and expertise will make any time you commit to this process worth the effort.

### **Risks**

Participating in this research holds no known or anticipated risks to you.

## **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your involvement in this research comes from a framework of participatory research in which effective assessment measures will be investigated through an initial survey and subsequent exploratory interviews with a group of post-secondary professional programs. This collaborative research approach offers an understanding of smart practice through group participation.

## **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary and participants may opt out of any question in the survey without consequence or explanation. All of responses will be kept confidential. They will be used for statistical purposes and will be reported only in aggregated form. Interview participation is also voluntary and opting out of discussion or certain questions will be relayed as an option at the beginning of the interview.

If you choose to withdraw from the study after the focus group, it is not possible to remove an individual's data from a group conversation however, I will remove your contributions from the audio tape and the transcription, and will only use your contributions in a summarized form if needed.

## **Anonymity**

All survey answers will be kept anonymous in the gathering and dissemination of results.

## **Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected as much as possible however, there will be limits due to the nature and size of the group of participants. As well, interviews may be conducted in a group setting. If there is information outside of the survey to be disclosed, this will be kept private and confidential if desired by the participant.

## **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others as a final smart practices document available for all undergraduate practicum programs as well as an Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) conference presentation.

## **Disposal of Data**

The final project will be archived with Library Archives Canada and UVic Space. Paper material will be shredded. Web or computer-based material will be deleted. The data will only be kept for a maximum of 5 years to allow for completion of the research and any other subsequent publications.

## **Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Ada Saab ([asaab@uvic.ca](mailto:asaab@uvic.ca)) and co-supervisor Dr. Norman Dolan ([ndolan@uvic.ca](mailto:ndolan@uvic.ca)).

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

## 11.5 APPENDIX E – OVERARCHING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **A Practicum of Fairness: A Study of Smart Practice for Professional Program Practicum Assessment**

#### **Introduction/Welcome (5 minutes)**

1. Please introduce yourself and share your biggest success in your work in the last year.

#### **Questions (65 minutes)**

2. What are the current successes in your practicum programs (placement, evaluation, assessment and appeal) as it now operates?
  - a. What are the staffing levels?
  - b. What are the office's responsibilities? Placement locations or facilitation?
  - c. Do you have an overall theory concerning the role of the practicum coordinator?
3. What are the current challenges in your practicum programs (placement, evaluation, assessment and appeal) as it now operates?
  - a. Resource constraints?
  - b. Faculty understanding?
  - c. Professional locations? Pay?
  - d. Short term placements? – Is 4 months enough to establish a professional relationship?
  - e. Is there a practicum fee for placement or merely tuition related?
4. What activities would you see as the most important factors in the process to create a solid practicum experience for students?
  - a. Assessment schemes? Grades? Completes? Credit values?
  - b. Preparatory orientation? – Webinar? Classroom? Guide?
  - c. Academic readiness? Minimum GPA needed?
  - d. How do you manage expectations and transition into the workplace? (The lack of structure, more lucrative than student life, less sterile/controlled environment)
5. How do we facilitate broader understanding of practicum smart practices among institutions?
6. How do you see a smart practice guide for practicum students contributing to both the role of student advocacy, and to practicum programs?

#### **Close (10 minutes)**

7. Please reflect on this engagement. Is there anything else you would like to add? Please feel free to write any notes or reflections around these questions in advance of the session.

## 11.6 APPENDIX F – OVERVIEW OF MAJOR AND DIVERGING THEMES

| Themes                                      | Literature Review  | Survey  | Interview   |
|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Relationships and Community Building</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student anxiety</li> <li>• Faculty involvement</li> <li>• Practicum as a priority</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Placement partnerships</li> <li>• Data collection</li> <li>• Committee design</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student anxiety</li> <li>• Sense of belonging</li> <li>• Evaluation consistency</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resource constraints</li> <li>• Committee design</li> <li>• Placement partnerships</li> <li>• Sense of belonging</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Process and Procedure</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student anxiety</li> <li>• Readiness</li> <li>• Practicum preparation</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty training</li> <li>• Information formats</li> <li>• Equitability/Flexibility</li> <li>• Coordinator consultation</li> <li>• Resource constraints</li> <li>• Procedural awareness</li> <li>• Practicum preparation</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student anxiety</li> <li>• Readiness</li> <li>• Equitability/Flexibility</li> <li>• Information formats</li> <li>• Resource constraints</li> <li>• Practicum preparation</li> </ul>                  |
| <b>Informative Decision-making</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility for actions</li> <li>• Emerging trends</li> <li>• Continuous review</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informational formats</li> <li>• Coordinator consultation</li> <li>• Practicum preparation</li> <li>• Resource constraints</li> <li>• Integrated curriculum</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practicum preparation</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Assessment</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student anxiety</li> <li>• Data collection</li> <li>• Continuous review</li> <li>• Instructor vs mentor</li> <li>• Learning Objectives</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated curriculum</li> <li>• Accreditation</li> <li>• Practicum preparation</li> <li>• Faculty orientation</li> <li>• Continuous review</li> <li>• Learning Objectives</li> <li>• Coordinator consultation</li> <li>• Information formats</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor vs mentor</li> <li>• Coordinator consultation</li> <li>• Integrated curriculum</li> <li>• Faculty orientation</li> <li>• Continuous review</li> <li>• Equitability/Flexibility</li> </ul> |
| <b>Communication</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student anxiety</li> <li>• Faculty collaboration</li> <li>• Placement partners</li> <li>• Online discussion groups</li> <li>• Committee design</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student anxiety</li> <li>• Faculty collaboration</li> <li>• Sense of belonging</li> <li>• Policy formulation</li> <li>• Content absorption</li> <li>• Content sustainability</li> <li>• Information formats</li> <li>• Practicum preparation</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student anxiety</li> <li>• Faculty collaboration</li> <li>• Placement partners</li> <li>• Sense of belonging</li> <li>• Committee design</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Mentorship</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship building</li> <li>• Guiding vs evaluation</li> <li>• Real world advice</li> <li>• Separation of duties</li> <li>• Committee design</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship building</li> <li>• Separation of duties</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship building</li> <li>• Guiding vs evaluation</li> <li>• Separation of duties</li> <li>• Committee design</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Theory to Practice</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apprenticeship history</li> <li>• Learning translation</li> <li>• Integrated curriculum</li> <li>• Emerging trends</li> <li>• Placement partnership</li> <li>• Faculty collaboration</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning translation</li> <li>• Practicum preparation</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning translation</li> <li>• Integrated curriculum</li> <li>• Emerging trends</li> <li>• Faculty collaboration</li> </ul>   |