



Field Education  
Teaching Placement Committee Handbook 2022-2023

CLAREMONT  
SCHOOL OF  
THEOLOGY

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**Teaching Placement Committee Handbook  
Claremont School of Theology Field Education Program  
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# **Teaching Placement Committee Handbook**

## **Field Education Program**

### **Claremont School of Theology**

#### **Introduction to Field Education at Claremont School of Theology**

Thank you so much for your willingness to work with a Claremont School of Theology student intern! The teaching placement committee is an important and highly recommended component of the field education process. This handbook is an orientation to the committee's role, beginning with an overview of the field education program and process.

Field education internships require partnership between the churches and the school, with the shared goal of preparing people well for ministry service and leadership. We send interns out expecting that they will make real contribution to the church's ministry. At the same time, we know that guiding a person in such a learning process takes time and commitment on your part. We value your partnership highly, and the time you devote to working with a student.

A supervised ministry experience is an essential part of preparation for ministry and religious leadership. Two semesters of field education internship are required for students in the Master of Divinity program. For students in the Master of Arts in Ministry, Leadership, and Service program one semester is required. Supervised ministry internships provide contexts for students to connect their classroom learning with the work of ministry. Through the field education process student interns deepen their capacity for theological reflection on their experiences. They develop knowledge and skill for ministry, grow in the attitudes and values need for service and leadership, and clarify their own vocational directions.

Internships are arranged individually, matching ministry settings with student interests and capacities. Supervisors and students work out a job description for the internship based on the needs in the setting and the opportunities for students to serve these needs and to learn through this service. Since this is a graduate-level program, responsibilities must be appropriate to this level of education.

During the semester(s) that students are placed in an internship they also participate in a weekly seminar, either on campus or with a combination of on-campus and online sessions. The seminar includes some reading and writing assignments, but the primary "textbooks" are the students' internship experiences. The seminar process is intended to foster self-awareness, relational and contextual competence, and depth of theological reflection. The model is reflective practice: regularly observing and thinking about one's work and experience in order to learn from successes and mistakes.

Seminar instructors are experienced pastors who are skilled at facilitating group conversation. Students receive academic credit for the combination of the internship and

seminar experience. The seminar instructors are the ones who grant credit, based on the supervisor's evaluations as well as students' participation in class.

Although most field education internships are in congregational settings, the handbooks and seminar processes are developed with a view to other contexts as well. Please feel free to adapt as needed.

Handbooks for the supervisors and the interns are also available to you on the school's website (under Academics at [www.cst.edu](http://www.cst.edu)). Reading these will give you a more complete picture of the roles and responsibilities of the partners in the field education program.

Feel free to contact the field education director at Claremont School of Theology with any questions, concerns, or problems that may arise.

### **Overview of the Teaching Placement Committee's Role**

The committee's role is to provide support and guidance, not supervision. Your faithful participation with the student will be a boost to morale and learning for your student intern.

The committee should meet monthly with the intern to guide, support and encourage him or her. Suggested topics are provided later in the handbook. The committee is intended to supplement the work of the supervisor, in order to enrich the student's learning throughout the year.

The teaching placement committee can support the intern's learning by:

- Providing welcome and hospitality, especially at the beginning of the year.
- Orienting the intern to the congregation or agency and helping him or her become involved.
- Listening and encouraging.
- Receiving and supporting the student as a learner, not a staff member.
- Supporting the learning experiences chosen by the intern and the supervisor.
- Keeping confidentiality – what is shared in the meeting stays in the meeting.
- Giving honest and constructive feedback regarding the intern's ministry skills – affirming strengths and offering suggestions for growth.
- Praying regularly for the intern.

The committee can strengthen the congregation or agency's involvement in the field education process by:

- Encouraging ownership by the congregation or agency for the intern's learning process.
- Helping the congregation or agency develop an identity as a teaching site, and an approach to working with the student intern.
- Providing opportunity for mutual feedback about the internship experience for all parties involved.

In addition, the teaching placement committee members help the intern understand what ministry means to them by:

- Offering opportunities for the intern to share what he or she is learning in seminary classes.
- Helping the student identify and understand the qualities of effective ministry and what it means in the placement context.
- Sharing experiences and insights about their own religious life and service.

In addition to monthly meetings, the committee is responsible for writing two letters describing your work with the intern, due at the end of each semester (due in early December and early May). The letters should be shared and discussed with the student before being turned in. You will find the format for these letters later in the handbook.

### **Offering Hospitality**

Early in the year, you can help the intern meet people and become involved in the programs, events, and practices that are important in your setting. Talk with the supervisor about how you can work together on this. You might host a welcoming reception, when the intern is introduced informally. It is often helpful to include an article in the newsletter introducing the intern and explaining his or her role as a learner. Near the end of the year, work with the supervisor to schedule a farewell celebration for your intern.

### **The Intern's Role as a Learner**

Sometimes congregations and agencies expect a student intern to function as a staff member and may be frustrated or confused when their expectations are not met. It is important for everyone to understand that the intern is a student who is there to learn and grow. The intern's role and responsibilities should make a genuine contribution to the church or organization, and these responsibilities should be assigned and interpreted as part of the learning process. The supervisor and teaching placement committee are the ones who can help everyone understand this distinctive role.

### **Committee Meetings**

The supervisor should be present at your committee's first meeting. This should be a time of introduction and orientation for everyone involved. After this, the supervisor does not attend teaching placement committee meetings. However, open communication between the committee and the supervisor is essential.

At the first meeting, establish the dates for the committee to meet throughout the rest of the year. If a chairperson has not yet been selected, decide who will convene and chair the meetings or how these responsibilities will be shared. Provide the student with your names and contact information.

The intern and committee chairperson are responsible for preparing and bringing the agenda for the teaching placement committee meetings.

Sometimes committees provide orientation materials for the intern. In a congregation these might include items such as:

- A church directory
- A local map
- A local newspaper
- A church mission statement, annual reports of programs, etc.
- A hymnal to loan or give to the student
- Recent worship bulletins
- Other pertinent written materials to help the intern know you, your community, and your church
- Anything you think the intern needs to know about who you are as a congregation – important regular events, groups in the church, programs, etc.

### **Suggested Topics for Committee Meetings**

The topics listed below are suggestions intended as a resource for you but not requirements. They tend to assume a congregational placement, but some could be adapted for other settings.

#### September, first meeting:

Committee members introduce themselves to the intern, sharing something about their involvement in the church or agency. Each member might tell the intern something important about the history of the church or agency. Ask the intern to introduce him or herself, including personal background, interests, plans for after graduation, and so forth. Talk with the intern about his or her learning outcomes and plans, expected weekly schedule, and any special needs and interests.

#### October, second meeting:

Share your opinions of what makes a good pastor or leader. Discuss what happens in key committees and other groups.

#### November, third meeting:

Hear the content and process of what the intern is learning in seminary—let him or her describe the overall seminary experience. Select a book to read with the intern from the intern’s seminary coursework. Decide if everyone on the committee will read the book, and make a plan to discuss it at a subsequent meeting.

#### December, fourth meeting:

What does each member appreciate about Advent/Christmas? What stresses/joys intensify during this season? What does each member (including the intern) see as the heart of the Christian message in this season? Discuss the committee’s evaluation letter with the intern. (Note: the school expects that interns will have a two-week break sometime between mid-December and mid-January.)

#### January, fifth meeting:

Reflect again with the intern on what he or she is learning in seminary. Have the student make a brief presentation and/or lead a discussion on the book you selected at the November meeting and discuss the main ideas in it.

February, sixth meeting:

Lent – What does each member do for spiritual practices and disciplines? What do they find most helpful in prayer?

March, seventh meeting:

Easter – What is the student learning about the Easter story? What does each member find most significant about Easter?

April, eighth meeting:

Look back at your year together. What have you done together? Identify what you can do to make your leave taking of the congregation a healthy transition. What gifts for ministry do you observe in the intern? Discuss your committee's evaluation letter with the intern.

### **Other Topics You May Want to Explore During the Year**

- ***Faith, doubt, questions:*** What kinds of sermon topics do you value? What would you most like to study and learn, concerning your religious life?
- Helpful ways for ministers to ***relate to lay leaders:*** What feels respectful, what matters, what is problematic?
- Ways to ***engage pastoral care:*** (e.g., how soon do you expect a visit when hospitalized, etc.)
- ***Finance and stewardship:*** What do you think is important in the church's management of money? What do you think and feel about stewardship drives, etc.
- ***Administration:*** What is the structure – formal and informal – of decision-making? Who does what at the church?
- ***Mission:*** What community and world needs most engage the congregation and you personally? What faithful actions do you take in the world?
- ***Worship:*** What do you appreciate, and what do you long for, in the worship life of the church?
- ***Music:*** If you sing in the choir, tell the intern about that experience; what is important for the pastor to know and do about supporting the music program?
- ***Education:*** What are the issues your church is interested in teaching and learning?

## **Prayer Support**

Often committees make a covenant with the intern to pray with each other in meetings and for each other throughout this year. Please also keep the School of Theology in your prayers. Ask the intern to share with you his or her own disciplines for spiritual formation and self-care.

## **Sharing Perceptions of the Intern's Work**

It is important that you share your perceptions and offer feedback to the intern so that he or she grows in confidence and competence. Most interns want to hear feedback, especially in areas that are important to them vocationally. Affirm your intern's strengths and gifts. Keep in mind that specific and descriptive feedback is usually more valuable than a general evaluative statement like "you did a good job." It is appropriate to discuss disappointments, as well as providing generous and specific positive feedback.

It is appropriate to address with the intern what you believe might be self-defeating behaviors if you observe any. Obviously this must be done with care and kindness. However, it usually is more harmful to keep silent than to share needed information. If you run into difficulty communicating with your intern, please feel free to call the director of field education for support and guidance.

## **Vocational Discernment**

For most students, the internship is a significant step in vocational discernment. For most in congregational internships, it is the first time they really take on the identity of pastor. Remember that most interns have completed only one year's worth of courses in a three-year degree program. Usually the intern has no experience in full-time ministry. Often the intern's first sermon in the field education placement comes before he or she has completed a preaching class. Therefore keep in mind that this is a formative time in which you have an opportunity to help shape the intern's sense of vocation. This means you can encourage him or her to develop strengths, and to move away from behaviors that hinder effective ministry. It is important to realize that some gifts will just begin to emerge in this context, and this experience is one of many which will shape the intern for God's call.

## **The Committee's Assessment Processes and Letters**

During the internship year, students are involved in several assessment processes. Interns complete written self-assessments at the end of each semester. The supervisor completes a written assessment each semester and discusses it with the intern. The teaching placement committee's assessment letter is an essential part of this larger picture, providing feedback to the intern for his or her own growth and learning. Feedback from others helps the intern develop self-awareness and the capacity to be self-correcting – essential competencies for ministry.

Assessment letters from the committee are due at Claremont School of Theology in December and May. The letter should be shared with the student before it is sent to the



school. If possible, please submit the letter by email to both the seminar instructor and field education director. Email addresses will be provided.

The letter should include the following information:

1. When did the committee meet, and what was discussed?
2. Describe any outcomes or projects the committee did with the intern (such as visiting other committees, making a presentation to a class, etc.)
3. In what ways did committee members observe the intern's ministry?
4. What strengths and skills did the intern demonstrate?
5. What are the areas of needed growth for the intern?
6. What strengths and areas of needed growth did the committee demonstrate?
7. In the December letter, include any outcomes that you as a committee and the intern have developed for the spring semester.

### **Questions or Concerns?**

At any time during the year, please feel free to contact the field education director if you have a question or concern. And thank you again for your participation!

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