Information for Faculty Sponsors of Internships in Psychoeducational Tutoring

Many college students and graduate students have worked as Psychoeducational Tutors without receiving academic credit, and the experience has nonetheless been quite rewarding for them. However, we believe that an internship with OPT is eminently deserving of college credit. This is not the sort of job that students do to pick up extra money – it provides an opportunity to learn about the application of principles of psychology, education, and other social sciences to the improvement of human life.

Our web site (www.psychoeducationaltutoring.com) explains our mission and our methods more fully. But for a succinct summary: we train tutors (such as college students) to work with children and adolescents in daily phone sessions, not just on academic skills (such as reading and math) but also on psychological skills such as friendship-building, self-discipline, anger control, anxiety-reduction, attentional focus, and mood-regulation. The tutors are not counselors or therapists, but use manuals: educational curricula created over the span of many years by one of the co-founders with the help of another. Although the work is “manualized,” the tutor still has much opportunity to make or break the success of the operation through the particular ways the tutor interacts with the child.

If you are a college faculty member who has the power to sponsor students in off-campus internships or independent studies for credit, this is written for you. We believe that internships for academic credit provide more than just a win-win solution, but a quadruple win: 1) You and your academic institution gain what we hope will be a popular internship or independent study that reflects positively on your offerings. 2) Our nonprofit organization gains access to more qualified tutors with which to fulfill its mission. 3) The students you sponsor gain a highly useful educational experience. And 4) the children or adolescents your students work with gain what we think is an often life-changing positive experience.

But optimism about implementing this is qualified by two “catches” to be aware of:

1. OPT does not operate on the same schedule as college courses do. We want interns who can commit to “wearing the ball and chain” in working with a student for at least a year, and who can keep going during summer breaks, winter breaks, and all other school breaks. The work that the student does tends to be much more spread out than the usual college course is – usually three hours of tutoring per week per child (and most students so far have worked with only one child) plus some training and supervision. It’s up to you to figure out how much credit the student gets, and when.
2. The student you agree to sponsor may fail to get hired, or could conceivably get fired. Our first responsibility is to the children receiving the tutoring, and we have to make our personnel decisions to maximize the children's welfare. It is very possible that we would not select someone a faculty sponsor recommends.

We would like to collaborate as thoroughly as desired with faculty members who are willing to sponsor students in internships or independent studies. We are happy to:

Send reports on the tutor's progress

Collaborate on methods of measuring the tutor's learning

Write narratives of what the tutor did, both in training and in service

Communicate the number of hours that the student engaged in service

Communicate with the faculty sponsor about any other aspect of what occurs in the internship.

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The rest of this is meant to help you understand what sorts of educational benefits this internship may provide. Why should a student get academic credit for this, as opposed to other part-time jobs students do for money and no credit?

Academic Benefits for Tutors

The topography of mental health. What can a psychologically healthy person do? What are the social and intrapsychic skills which are conducive to high psychological functioning? The tutor learns, while teaching young students, a classification of these consisting of 16 skill areas. Later, subdivisions of the 16 skills are defined so as to create a master “skills axis” of 62 skills. These lists were gleaned from a great deal of literature in CBT, social skills training, behavior therapy, psychoanalytic therapy, and others. These lists were created by extensive reading while asking the question, “What subject matter, if learned, makes one mentally healthier?”

This classification of mental health skills helps children in their choices of adaptive behaviors in response to life situations. It also is of benefit to helping professionals in choosing the targets of interventions with clients.

Approaches to reading instruction. Many tutors work to help their students read better. Our book, Manual for Tutors and Teachers of Reading, explains big ideas of reading instruction, and presents very specific directions on how to teach reading. Oral language development, phonemic awareness, spatial awareness, letter-sound correspondence, sounding and blending of individual words, and finally text reading as the culmination of those skills are explained, along with practical tutoring methods to enhance each of these
Teaching and learning of reading are seen as prototypes of teaching and learning in general. Provision of a supportive interpersonal climate, choosing the correct level of task difficulty, modeling task performance, providing accurate and effective reinforcement, choosing the correct time duration for a given exercise, and others, are choices necessary in all education (including psychological skills education) as well as reading instruction.

**Methods of influence.** How does one person (such as a tutor) help another person to get better psychological skills? Modeling, instruction, practice, reinforcement, and five others are methods the tutor should become aware of and consciously use in the process of interacting with the student.

**The big ideas behind the “cognitive revolution.”** The notion that our cognitions play a major role in determining our feelings and behaviors, and the notion that we can gradually cultivate the ability to become aware of our thoughts and consciously choose them in order to produce the best results – these are the big ideas that launched cognitive therapy. These ideas are emphasized in lots of the manuals that tutors use to teach students.

**A classification of cognitions.** A twelve-category system of classifying thoughts has proved extremely helpful for people working to improve their psychological functioning. This system is taught to the child student through lots and lots of specific examples interspersed among entertaining stories.

**Concepts of applied behavior analysis.** Especially those students who get college credit for an internship, as well as other tutors, should read a manual produced for this program, entitled *Reinforcement and Punishment: Vignettes for Practice in Applied Behavior Analysis*. This book applies concepts such as positive and negative reinforcement, response cost and other punishment, differential reinforcement, extinction, the extinction burst, satiation, establishing operations, and others, to specific situations drawn from clinical practice and everyday life. We are currently searching for ways of delivering this part of the curriculum to parents of the students we work with.

**Psychoeducational approaches to anxiety-reduction.** Our manual, *A Programmed Course in Anxiety-Reduction and Courage Skills*, puts into a format that can be grasped by young students major ideas that have accumulated through decades of research: causes of anxiety, the distinction between realistic and unrealistic fear, the mastery versus avoidance choice point, relaxation techniques, exposure, fantasy rehearsal, constructing and moving along a hierarchy of difficulty, use of exposure and ritual prevention with compulsions, cognitive and behavioral approaches to insomnia, and others.

**Psychoeducational approaches to anger control.** Our manual, *A Programmed Course in Conflict-Resolution and Anger Control*, goes over major concepts in learning skills of fortitude, nonviolence, respectful talk, and rational conflict-resolution.

**Psychoeducational approaches to self-discipline and goal attainment.**
Programmed Course in Self-Discipline draws upon research findings from the study of self-control, self-regulation, and productivity, with the practical applied goal of helping the young student be able to make the difficult choices necessary to attain long-term goals.

**Social Skills Training.** Our manual, *A Programmed Course in Friendship-Building and Social Skills*, familiarizes tutors in concepts of social skills training: greeting and parting rituals, listening skills, social conversation, tones of voice and eye contact, etc. As with other manuals, the child is reading the manual in “alternate reading” with the tutor, learning directly from it.

There are a good number of other areas of academic interest to which tutors may be exposed. The rest of this web site, particularly the page on our books, gives a flavor for these. But in addition to these, another important area of potential self-development for tutors is:

**Workplace skills for the tutor.** It probably does not startle faculty members to hear that college students and graduate students can be highly intelligent, and able to do well on tests and papers, but quite lacking in workplace skills. Tutors get a chance to practice the following:

- Appointment-keeping
- Responding in a timely manner to communications from supervisors
- Accepting suggestions from supervisors without feeling the need to “know it all” from the start
- Responding with calmness to any hostility from students or parents
- Record-keeping about one's work activities
- Being organized and planful in the conduct of the work
- Being outcome-focused, aware of and curious about the results of the efforts
- Being cheerful and pleasant to work with, both with students, parents, and supervisors
- Following the risk-management guidelines that apply to any business one is involved in
- Communicating enthusiasm and approval through the tone of voice (which is particularly important for telephone communications)
- Contributing creative ideas for “continuous quality improvement” in promoting the organization's mission
- Perhaps becoming so competent that one can get involved in the training of other
If you have any questions about this experience for your students, we would love to chat with you. If you would like to read any of our manuals in more depth, we'll send you an electronic copy of any that you want. Our vision is to provide a favorable enough opportunity for students and their faculty sponsors that that long-term relationships will grow. Another part of our vision is that a sufficient number of students at any one institution will take part in this that they can mutually support each other in obtaining maximum benefit from it, from encouraging less experienced colleagues, and from interacting with one another.