



Community Corrections – Department of Probation and Parole – Harrisonburg (District 39)

Placement Description

Parole/Probation supervision of offenders in the community. Prefer student to work 10-15 hours per week and prefer students who are outgoing and assertive. Students must pass a drug test and criminal background investigation and be finger printed.

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

- Court Observations
- Home visits with criminal offenders
- Employment contacts/Community Contacts
- Observe and perform interview at the jail and the Probation Office
- Assist with probation reports
- Learn to perform investigations
- Learn to keep case notes & proper case management

Contact Information

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Read about students' experiences at this site below:



Megan Parker – Fall 2016

The District 39 Probation and Parole office, located in downtown Harrisonburg, is responsible for supervising the probations of over 1,000 offenders. The probation office aims to successfully reintegrate offenders into society, while assisting them through their probations. The mission of the probation office is “to facilitate positive change in offender behavior, and maximize community safety for all, by utilizing services that are available to foster a motivational environment, while preserving dignity and respect for all”. This mission is fulfilled through the interactions probations have with the offenders on their caseload, as well as through interactions with other officers. Probation supervision is systematic and based on scientific methods to determine the level of supervision required for each person. This allows each offender to have a personalized probation that meets their individual needs. Probation officers also facilitate positive change in offenders by assisting them with whatever they may need, in any way they can. These needs can be help finding a job, finding effective therapy groups, or something as simple giving them food they may need from the food pantry. During my time at the probation office, I was able to see how caring the officers at District 39 truly are. While being a probation officer may be difficult and frustrating at times, the officers care about their offenders and want to see them live better, meaningful lives.

At District 39, I had many varying responsibilities. At the beginning of the semester, the tasks I was responsible for were small, but necessary. I would shred documents, file papers, attend Circuit Court, and assist my supervisor and other officers with whatever they needed. The beginning of the semester was slow, but this was expected. It is not possible to start working on tasks that the officers do without learning how to do them first. During the beginning of the semester, I spent some of my time learning how to “be a probation officer”. As the semester progressed, I took on greater responsibilities.

After learning how to navigate CORIS –the database used to handle all information about offenders and their probation –I began to research criminal histories and input them into CORIS, input COMPAS data (surveys used that ask questions about an offender’s criminal history and current attitudes to determine what level of supervision they require) into CORIS, and log notes from meeting with offenders. One of my main responsibilities at the office was to meet with offenders. At first, I would sit in on meetings that my supervisor would have with probationers on her caseload. This helped me to learn how to conduct meetings on my own. Eventually, I had one-on-one meetings with offenders on my own. This was one of my favorite things to do at the office because I had conversations offenders on my own and because I was entrusted with a great amount of responsibility. Another prominent aspect of my field placement was conducting drug screens. While this was not one of my favorite things to do, given the somewhat unsanitary nature of it (although I did wear gloves, so it was not actually unsanitary), it was necessary. All offenders on probation are required to maintain their sobriety and remain drug and alcohol-free throughout their probation; drug screens are used to make them accountable to for their actions. Another task I had during my field placement was going on home visits with my supervisor. Probation officers conduct home visits to verify an offender’s address, as well as to check up on them while they are home. While this may seem intrusive, home visits were short and offenders were warned ahead of time when their probation officer would be conducting a home visit.



During my time at the probation office, I not only learned about probation and the criminal justice system but I also learned a lot about myself as well. I learned that I can handle a lot more responsibility than I thought. Through my experience, I became more diverse because I interacted with people that were much different than myself. I truly loved this aspect of my field placement because I broadened my horizons and learned more about other people. My field placement helped me to burst my “JMU bubble” because I experienced Harrisonburg in a different light. As JMU students, we can sometimes forget that other people live in Harrisonburg, but my field placement was humbling because I was able to see how other people in our community live. My time at the probation office also helped me figure out my career goals. Before starting at District 39, I was unsure of what I wanted to do with my future, although I knew I was interested in law and psychology and wanted to combine my two passions into a career. During the semester, I realized that I want a career in which I can help other people, although I am still unsure of just what I want to do.

I am extremely grateful for my time at the District 39 Probation and Parole office. I cannot think of any disadvantages to my field placement; every aspect –the staff, my responsibilities, the offenders –was advantageous. The workplace was always a great environment to be in and the officers were always extremely kind and helpful. Even though I was much younger and less experienced than they are, they always made me feel as though I was equal to them and was always willing to help me if I ever needed it. I highly recommend a field placement at the District 39 Probation and Parole office for anyone that is interested in the law, the criminal justice system, or helping others.

Lauren Argenbright – Spring 2016

District 39 Probation and Parole supervises over 1,000 felony offenders who reside in the city of Harrisonburg, Rockingham County, and Page County. Their mission is “to facilitate a positive change in offender behavior, and to maximize community safety for all, by utilizing services that are available to foster a motivational environment, while preserving dignity and respect for all.” They fulfill this mission by comprehensively supervising individuals sentenced to probation in order to promote public safety and help offenders improve their lives. The supervision of offenders involves meeting with them on a regular basis, both at the District 39 office and in their homes, conducting drug tests, and coordinating with substance abuse and mental health treatment providers.

During my time at District 39, I was able to assist with all of these activities. At the start of my field placement, I simply sat in on office meetings between probation officers and offenders, but as my skills and confidence grew, I conducted meetings with offenders independently. During these meetings we would discuss the offender’s progress as well as any issues he or she was having. I also observed and collected urine samples for drug tests, accompanied probation officers on home visits all throughout Rockingham County, documented offender information in a state-wide community corrections database called CORIS, organized offender case files, and prepared for offender office visits. I also frequently got to observe Rockingham County Circuit Court proceedings. Probation officers must be present in court to



open new cases for offenders sentenced to probation and they are often required to testify in cases involving offenders currently under supervision. Another extremely interesting task I completed while at District 39 was assisting with pre-sentencing reports. These are court-ordered reports in which the probation officers must compile the entire criminal, family, mental health, physical health, educational, and work history of a newly convicted offender. I was able to assist the officers in collecting and documenting all of this information, including the opportunity to sit in on in-depth interviews with the offenders.

I am incredibly grateful for my experience at District 39 and the opportunities it afforded me. Through completing and assisting with all these tasks, I believe I gained many valuable skills. I now have a much greater understanding of the community corrections system and the court system. I witnessed first-hand all the steps offenders go through when they enter the criminal justice system. One of the most rewarding aspects of this internship for me was getting to know the offenders and understand their lives and how they ended up in the situation they are currently in. Coming in to this experience at District 39, I was nervous about dealing with offenders and since I was more familiar with the policing rather than the probation side of law enforcement, I think I tended to define offenders by their crimes. However, through this experience, I have been able to challenge that bias and see offenders simply as the people they are, not as the crimes they have committed.

In addition to this increased open-mindedness, I have also gained confidence in my interpersonal skills through this experience. With the mentoring of my supervisors, Officer Burner and Officer Walston, I learned how to more effectively communicate with all kinds of people. As a more introverted person, these skills caused my confidence to grow a great deal and I know feel much more capable to lead an interview or take control of a situation than I did at the start of my field placement. These new found skills will likely be extremely beneficial to me in my future career as a police officer and thus, I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity my time at District 39 gave me to hone them.

Despite being a place for professional growth and development, District 39 was also just a fun place to be. I looked forward to every day I spent there because the staff is truly like a family. They were incredibly welcoming and they create a workplace culture that is very open and supportive. There were truly no disadvantages to this experience for me and the advantages are countless. I would absolutely rank my time at District 39 as one of the most memorable and rewarding experiences I have had while at JMU. If you have any interest in the criminal justice system, social work, forensic psychology, or simply helping people better their lives—as this is what probation officers strive to do each day—I highly recommend the field placement at District 39 Probation and Parole.

Francesca Castellano – Spring 2015

The official mission of District 39 is to “enhance public safety by controlling and supervising sentenced offenders in a humane, cost-efficient manner, consistent with sound



correctional principles and constitutional standards.” Essentially, they protect the public’s safety through the rehabilitation of offenders in the area. They provide structured guidance as well as offer services in the community to help offenders deal with drug or alcohol abuse, emotional or behavioral issues amongst numerous other programs. In addition to supervising, Parole officers act as a pseudo-therapist by counseling offenders on any issues they may be dealing with.

A Parole officer has various responsibilities ranging from going on home visits to meeting with offenders in the office who just need to talk. As an intern, you will get experience with all of the jobs they have to do on a daily basis. There is no set schedule each day you report into District 39. After passing a background check, you are allowed the responsibilities of a typical Parole officer, which is very exciting. One of the primary jobs you are involved in is meeting with offenders. Meeting with them includes conducting drug screens of different types, ensuring offenders are going to work and paying off court costs, and taking notes about their progress then inputting the information into CORIS. CORIS is a program used by all law enforcement officers and acts as an online public file of each offender, which includes their medical history, convictions, family history as well as other general information. In addition to CORIS, organizing offender’s files in the office is extremely important in maintaining the most current information about the person, especially during case reviews or as the offender is approaching the end of their probationary period. Meetings with offenders are not only in the office, they are also conducted if the offender is in jail and is attempting to enter specific programs in the community such as Detention and Diversion or Gemeinschaft. Home visits are conducted either randomly or by appointment and their purpose is to ensure the offender is living at the residence they claim they are living at and to ensure there are no drugs or alcohol in the home as a regulation of their probation. Another responsibility is having to go to court to testify on behalf of offenders. Attending court is something that typically happens on a daily basis so you quickly become familiar with court proceedings and jargon. Lastly, if an offender is arrested while on probation, their Parole officer will go over to the jail and issue a warrant as well as get a drug screen.

Working for District 39 exposes you to many different aspects of the criminal justice system. Interacting with various law enforcement positions allows you to see into more than just a Parole officer’s job, but other options in law enforcement. I did not know any jargon or legal terms when I first started working there, however after much exposure and practice, it becomes second nature and you can more easily relate to what others are saying. As an intern you will receive your own badge so the private information that the state has is available all the time. This requires practicing extreme maturity by maintaining people’s privacy. By handling sensitive information on a daily basis, it feels like you are not just an intern but an integral part of the mission of District 39. You become a part of the offenders’ lives as much as their actual Parole officers do which gives you a real life experience in the field. I also loved finally being able to use my counseling skills I’ve learned in the classroom, in the real world. I got to help people emotionally and they saw my opinion as a genuine option and not just advice from an inexperienced kid. The only limitation is that you can never plan ahead for a “regular day” because every day is different. Making schedules for the next day is basically impossible because one minute you’re planning on organizing files and then the next minute you have to run to the



jail to meet with an offender. As someone who thrives in high stress situations and loves variability, every day was exciting and fun. However, I can see how some people who value schedules and structure might feel on edge. More than anything, I loved the cohesiveness of the office and the emphasis on successful communication so that everyone has the most up to date information.

Throughout the semester, I've learned numerous important skills that are used within all law enforcement agencies. I've conducted countless amount of drugs screens, written many reports, and most importantly learned how to interact with offenders of all different personalities and crimes. There is no standard offender and no standard way to be a Parole officer, it's a job that you can make your own. I had no experience with legal jargon before working at District 39 and now I can use it without any hesitation. In addition to the experience with the legal system, I practiced how to be a part of an office and how to work under multiple bosses. I learned how to relate to people of different positions and how differentiate when its time to be serious and when its time to joke around.

At first, the job is a little intimidating because of all of the various aspects of it as well as getting thrown into the mix to learn. The best way to learn how to do something within the office is to be directly exposed to it and try it on your own. I've learned how to take initiative and have become more confident in my abilities and myself. Having responsibility has given me the experience needed to act as an adult and feel like I'm a part of the "real world". I would recommend this internship to anyone interested in the criminal justice field and psychology; I'm so lucky to have had this experience.

Allison Walker – Spring 2015

The mission of probation and parole programs is to enhance public safety by positively impacting offenders so they will lead pro-social and crime-free lives. As a part of the Virginia Department of Corrections, the probation and parole programs accomplish this mission through the reintegration of sentenced men and women in their custody and care by providing supervision and control, effective programs and re-entry services in safe environments which foster positive change and growth consistent with research-based evidence, fiscal responsibility, and constitutional standards. The Virginia Department of Corrections as a whole is also centered on seven core values that include safety, ethics, learning, commitment, support, respect, and honesty.

Probation officers supervise offenders through office contacts and community contacts, while offering a wide range of services in order to best reintegrate them back into the community and provides them with the resources to be productive and law-abiding citizens. Probation exhibits a perfect balance between law enforcement and counseling. They offer a variety of resources to assist in the offenders' reintegration, such as substance abuse treatment, sex offender treatment, community service opportunities to help with court costs, housing, etc.



I had an extensive amount of opportunities while interning at the Harrisonburg Probation and Parole office. On a daily basis, I collaborated with the Commonwealth's Attorney office and local law enforcement agencies. Also, I observed court proceedings related to initial sentencing and probation violations. My main task as an intern was to assist probation officers through effective supervision and management of caseloads, in which I would conduct interviews with the probationers in the office. During these office contacts, I would check an offender's progress with things such as job applications, housing, paying court costs, and any other issues they may have. In a majority of the office contacts I would also conduct urine screens. After each and every meeting I had with an offender, I would be required to log the activity using the Virginia Department of Corrections' computer system. I also had the chance to work the front desk where I would greet the probationers and check them in. Once they informed me of who they were here to see, it was my responsibility to notify the officer that they were here. Within this secretary position, I learned how to open new cases when they were sent to Probation and Parole from a prison, which also required sending letters to the offenders before they are released from prison to provide them with instructions of when to report to the Probation and Parole office upon their release. And lastly, I was able to attend the gang task force meetings on multiple occasions where officers from many different law enforcement agencies come together to collaborate and share information on the current gang population here in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County.

At the beginning of my internship, I was specifically assigned to one of the two sex offender officers. I was able to assist her in the supervision of 32 sex offenders. However, as the semester went on, I was really grateful to be able to branch out and work with so many different officers. During the second half of my time at the Probation and Parole office, I would bounce around from officer to officer, taking on any task or job they needed done. I really enjoyed this time of my internship because I was able to work with all types of offenders and I learned so much about the diversity of the offenders' lives and how each and every one of them has a different and unique background. This setup was very advantageous because I was exposed to many different processes and was able to learn how different officers handle different situations. I was very lucky in that I was consistently given the opportunity to practice what I had been learning all semester so by the end of the semester, I was completing tasks and handling case information on my own.

My absolute favorite part of my field placement at Harrisonburg Probation and Parole was the interaction with the offenders. I love to just listen to the offenders and hear about their progress. However, I most enjoyed going on home contacts with the officers because it was really helpful to see how the offenders and their families lived. After I began, I realized much easier it was to be unbiased towards the offenders than I had imagined it would be. However, the hardest part was to see offenders live in ways and let their offense rule their life in ways that would lead to neglect of their children. Also, there were times where it was more difficult to listen to the stories of the sex offenders, especially those involving very young children.



Nonetheless, I was challenged in ways I had never been challenged before and I think it has helped me in my development of professionalism.

I am so appreciative of the opportunity to be a part of the field placement program and be able gain first-hand experience in a real work setting. I have learned so much during this past semester, both through my site experience but also through the classroom portion of this course. The main thing I learned at the Probation and Parole office is that if you plan to work with this type of population, especially when it may involve mental illness, it is imperative that you adopt a nonjudgmental and optimistic attitude. I have really enjoyed working with offenders and assisting them in the process of reintegration into the community, but it can definitely get frustrating at times. I have learned of the importance of leaving my opinion at the door when I go into the office because although these individuals have screwed up in some way or another, they all deserve a chance to change their lives around but that is not possible if we, as probation officers, do not believe in them.

Through the field placement program, and specifically my experience at my site, I have enormously expanded my knowledge of the criminal justice system. There is so much more to learn while being in an actual work setting compared to learning from textbooks in a classroom. I am so thankful to have had this opportunity to grow as an individual and professional. I have enhanced my communication skills, my attention to detail, my writing skills, as well as many other interpersonal skills. Overall, my experience at Harrisonburg Probation and Parole was amazing. I was able to familiarize myself with many aspects of the Virginia Department of Corrections in hopes that I will continue working in this field in the future. My experience would not have been what it was without the encouraging and supportive staff of District 39 Probation and Parole.

Spring 2013 - Maura Flatley

The mission of Probation and Parole is to provide the best services and most effective programs to offenders while enhancing public safety. Probation officers supervise offenders, while offering a range of services in order to best reintegrate them into society. Probation seeks a balance between law enforcement and counseling and encourages prosocial behavior. They offer a variety of referrals, including substance abuse groups, sex offender groups, the CSB, housing, and many

I had a lot of different opportunities while interning at Probation and Parole. I went on home contacts, where we visited an offender's home and confirmed the address they provided by seeing their house, their bed, and their clothes. I went to the jail and completed Detention and



Diversion evaluations of offenders in custody before sentencing. I observed and performed interviews at the probation office. These office contacts often consisted of completing COMPAS assessments, checking an offender's progress with things such as housing, job applications, and paying court costs and restitution. I conducted urine screens. Although many offenders must provide a urine screen, these are usually conducted on the offenders with histories of drug use.

I regularly used CORIS, the Department of Corrections computer system. I entered criminal histories, conducted and entered COMPAS assessments (assessing an offender's risk of reoffending), and entered various other types of data. I attended office meetings, including the mandatory bimonthly dialogue, which has a specific structure and topic to discuss. I was also able to attend a gang task force meeting and visit Gemeinschaft, an all-male group home for post-release individuals.

As a floater, my experience was different than most interns'. I was not assigned to a specific officer; instead, I would float around to different officers who needed my help or had something for me to do. The advantage of this approach was that I was able to work with many different officers and was exposed to a lot of different processes in Probation and Parole. The disadvantage was that, while I was exposed to a lot of things, I probably could have learned to do things more in-depth had I been assigned to one officer. I might have been able to become better acquainted with the more standard processes. There were a lot of things that I was shown once or twice, but was then not able to practice, so I was not able to complete it independently.

My favorite thing at probation was the interaction with the offenders, especially for home and office contacts. Home contacts are interesting because not only do you get out of the office, but you also get to see how people live. I experienced many different types of living situations. I also liked the counseling aspect of the office visits. I liked that Probation Officers (POs) get to be a condensed version of a life coach to help the offenders get their lives back on track. Another thing I like is that even though each PO has their own caseload, teamwork is still an important aspect of the job. The officers rely on each other for support in many different ways. My least favorite thing was filing; there is a lot of paperwork involved with this career. However, I have solidified my knowledge of the alphabet and realized that filing is an extremely important part of any job.

I learned so much while interning at Probation; however, one of the most important things I learned was that there is no such thing as a stereotypical probationer. An offender on probation can be anyone from a JMU student, to a substance abuser, to a middle-class mother of three. While I know that people of any demographic commit crimes, it was interesting to experience this firsthand. In addition, each probationer receives counseling to some degree, even if it is only through their meetings with their officer. I was surprised at how much I liked this aspect of probation and it has made me broaden my career search to include counseling.

Through this internship, I have greatly expanded my knowledge of the criminal justice system. Although I am a criminal justice minor, I learned so much by being directly immersed. I became acquainted with the courts, what classifies felonies and misdemeanors, how people get



on probation, how probation works with other agencies, COMPAS assessments, the CSB, how to write reports, how to put files together, and more. I developed new skills including entering data in CORIS, administering urine screens, conducting interviews, entering notes, learning case management, conducting home visits, amongst many other things. I enhanced my writing skills through writing notes and letters; my attention to detail when searching for and entering data; and my interpersonal skills with both coworkers and offenders at meetings and home visits.

Overall, I had a really good experience interning at Probation and Parole. I was able to familiarize myself with many aspects of District 39 and the DOC. Everyone was always willing to help me and easy to talk to. Despite the fact that I learned a lot, there is still so much to learn. The criminal justice system is complex and requires a fairly vast knowledge of how it operates. This internship has both helped and confused me with my career choice because while I want to pursue something related to criminal justice, it has also opened my eyes to counseling. I look forward to using what I have learned at this internship as a basis for my career.