



# JMU Counseling Center

**\*\*Please note, to avoid ethical issues that may occur when the CC staff relate to an individual in a role other than as a client, all current and former CC clients will be excluded from training and employment opportunities at the CC. \*\***

## Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

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- Assist in various Counseling Center (CC) outreach events which can include but is not limited to tabling, animal assisted activities, and presentations on a variety of mental health and awareness topics
- Assist in promoting CC outreach events through the use of CC social media sites and creation of digital signs/E-boards
- Attend in-service training and weekly supervision meetings
- Develop original outreach project based on area of personal interest related to mental health
- Work with staff members on relevant projects and/or research

## Other Notes

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- Not a counseling placement
- Not direct observation of counseling

## Contact Information

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**Read about students' experiences at this site below:**



### *Spring 2017 – Kami Aiello*

The James Madison University Counseling Center is the on-campus counseling center for full-time students. It is their mission to provide a safe, supportive, trusting and confidential environment which empowers students to develop the awareness, values and skills they need to meet future challenges and lead vital, meaningful lives. The Counseling Center achieves this mission by providing services in the form of individual counseling, group counseling, online self-help resources, treatment programs, consultation services, self-care spaces, workshops and outreach events. Although this is a lot of different resources to offer, the Counseling Center is staffed to meet the requirements of each service.

As the Field Placement intern, my supervisor was the Outreach Coordinator and I worked directly under her. I was tasked to create visibility for the two therapy dogs at the Counseling Center, to run their social media, and to find a way for students to more easily recognize their presence on campus. I did this by facilitating an Outreach event called “Paws for a Purpose” which created a routine weekly time for students, faculty and staff to all come by and meet or hang out with the two therapy dogs, Francis and Wicket. This Outreach event was a joint effort between myself and my supervisor as well as the two owners and handlers of the therapy dogs. Alongside of this incredible experience of working with, teaching the dogs how to respond to me as their handler, and introducing them to hundreds of new students, I was also charged with running the social media for the Counseling Center on two platforms: Instagram and Twitter. I was involved in the posts that were on Facebook to some degree if they involved challenges or videos that had to do with other Outreach events. Sometimes this included taking pictures around the Counseling Center and the self-care spaces to advertise them, or organizing a time when Duke Dog could come into the Counseling Center to take pictures with the therapy dogs and in other spaces that we saw fit at the time. A lot of the work I did on social media included different posts to help de-stigmatize mental health and the ways that people can find mental health on a college campus. I was creating posts through the voices of the therapy dogs which included language with positive connotations and puns which make people associate the Counseling Center with decreased negativity and stigmatization.

My experience with the Counseling Center was absolutely incredible. I enjoyed how I was able to pursue my passion in working with animals as well as wrapping it around counseling on a university level. I learned how to talk to people who were my peers but also people who were much older than I am with knowledge and respect when I was taking outings with the therapy dogs and introducing them to new people. I connected with several different counselors on staff at the Counseling Center during my time there, and even the Director took interest in what I was doing and how I was creating opportunities for them to grow and de-stigmatize mental health around the college population.

One disadvantage of the Counseling Center is that as the Field Placement intern, you are not allowed to “sit in” on any individual sessions or group sessions that are run through the Counseling Center. Because of their strictly confidential environment, and the fact that the students who are seeking services are your peers makes it difficult for that to be okay. Also, as an undergraduate, you are not eligible to perform any services or facilitate counseling. If you are looking for an experience where you can observe services such as group counseling, the



Counseling Center will not be the experience you're looking to grow through. It is, however an experience where you can help create a difference around JMU's campus and have an influence in helping to destigmatize mental health.

I went into this experience already with some knowledge of the therapy dogs as I was involved with them working on my Senior Honors Thesis through the Honors College. I was fortunate enough to already have a relationship with Dr. Colleen Tennyson who is Francis's mom, and the Psychiatrist on staff at the Counseling Center. She served on my committee for my Honors Thesis and was one of a few advocates for my offer to work as the Field Placement intern during the Spring 2017 semester. Dr. Tennyson was also my secondary supervisor during my Field Placement experience.

One of the most valuable skills I learned while I was at my Field Placement was how to communicate between multiple people of different authority levels. I had to communicate with the Graduate Assistants for some of my assigned projects, with members of the staff for other projects and even with the Director for other experiences I was involved in during my time at the Counseling Center. I learned through these many interactions that communication is key in any workplace whether that's between staff members or between a counselor and a client. When people around the office are communicating on a professional level effectively, it makes it easier to then also communicate in a more casual manner. Through my many conversations with the people in the JMU Counseling Center I learned that their ease of communication made for an environment where everyone felt cared for and cared about, whether that was a quick check in as they were passing in the hallway, the office manager taking time to crack a joke, or a deeper sit down conversation when a family matter was occupying thought space.

I felt that in my one semester in the Counseling Center family that I was fully immersed in their circle. There was never a time someone just walked past me without asking me how I was doing or saying hello or good morning. The environment is one that fosters comfort, openness, support and most importantly learning. There are students anywhere from the undergraduate level all the way up to post-doctoral internships. The counselors on staff value learning and truly embrace their open door policy. Anyone will talk to you if you take the time to ask them about their job or their role. Of course they maintain a professional conduct and will keep confidentiality as priority, but they will always be willing to be as much help to you as possible. This is one thing that I truly appreciated about this Field Placement experience. It wasn't just about the tasks I was given. It was about helping me grow into the young professional I want to be in the future. It was about giving me something that could challenge me at the right times, and be something that I could have a routine with as well.

The work I did at the Counseling Center was important because I placed importance on it but also because I had supervisors who trusted me and indulged my creativity all the time. Yes, I worked on data entry for Program Assessments, but I also brought Duke Dog for a photo shoot in the Counseling Center self-care spaces. I took photos of the therapy dogs every chance I had, and those pictures will be used for years to come. I left my mark there, and everyone's mark will look different, and leave a meaning in those walls; not because it's forced, but because whatever you bring to the table is welcomed, embraced, and remembered.



***Fall 2015 - Meredith Kurtz***

The JMU Counseling Center is dedicated to the personal, social, and academic development of all JMU students. Their mission is to “Provide a safe, supportive, trusting, and confidential environment which empowers students to develop the awareness, values, and skills they will need to meet future challenges and lead vital, meaningful lives.” To accomplish this goal, the Center provides free and confidential counseling services within a developmental, proactive, and outreach-oriented framework. The primary focus of the Counseling Center mission is to provide the highest quality individual and group counseling to students struggling with mental health problems. It also serves as an assessment and referral source for students with more serious and chronic psychological difficulties. The Center engages in active outreach efforts that focus on the prevention of problems in order to create a safe and encouraging academic environment. The Center is committed to collaborating and partnering with other Student Affairs units and University divisions, serving as consultants on psychological matters, and playing an integral role in the management of emergencies and crises.

At my site I held two very different roles. In one capacity I was considered the student outreach coordinator where I created, implemented, and assessed outreach programs for the counseling center. This includes table events for our awareness campaigns as well as presentations to various organizations per request. Under this role I was also able to supervise another student outreach coordinator who I taught to input outreach survey data and oversaw her program development of an animal assisted therapeutic activity. The other half of my duties at the Counseling Center were more behind the scenes under the title of program development. Within this role, I worked with my supervisor to draft and then implement two different treatment programs. One is a wilderness therapy trip and the other is a Sexual Trauma Empowerment Program. Each of these programs required me to collaborate with other counseling staff and outside organizations. Most of what I did was creating the necessary documentation. For the Wilderness Therapy trip, this included making a schedule with process groups and survival workshops for the duration of a weeklong backpacking trip. I designed the itinerary and map route for the trip as well as made flyers for the staff referral process. I had to make new informed consent for the clients to participate as well as draft an IRB in order to implement specific research practices throughout the program. As for the STEP treatment program, I similarly had to sift through the literature and past research in order to craft an outline for a 5 week psychoeducational structured treatment program. This includes picking relevant and specific topics for each week's discussion as well as incorporating beneficial handouts and resource lists for the participants. Along with the wilderness therapy program, we hope to be able to collect research data from this program, so I will also have to craft an IRB and potential survey questionnaires to assess effectiveness of the program.

The Counseling Center was such a great place to have my field placement experience. I have worked there for a total of three semesters, and I am going to be continuing to work with the staff in the same capacity next semester. What drew me to this site originally was the counseling setting. I knew I wanted to pursue a career in counseling, most likely mental health



related, but I was not sure in what type of setting. Through working with my supervisor, Dr. Leslie Gerrard, I found what I am truly passionate about and that is the idea of wilderness therapy. What kept me working within the site though is the inviting, friendly, and encouraging atmosphere. I have had the opportunity to work alongside many different staff members at the Center, and they are all so kind and willing to help in any way they can. I also noticed in my time at the counseling center that although each staff member has their own title and background, some more qualified than others, they all treat each other as equals. There is no competition or idea of authority over one another. The director is the one in charge with the ultimate say, but they all collaborate with one another on cases and seek advice from each other because they understand and respect the idea that everyone has something useful to contribute. This is truly a unique aspect of the environment that I find inspiring and strive to find when I seek a site for my career. Another great aspect of this site is that you get to see the inner workings of a successful counseling center at the university level. I know I originally wanted to pursue school counseling at the elementary level, but working at this site has made me realize that working with college age students is very rewarding and more suitable for myself. I encourage others who are considering school counseling to try out all different levels of the field (elementary, high, and secondary) because they are all so different.

Within my time at the counseling center, I have been able to learn so much and have acquired many useful skills that can then be transferred towards my career goals. I believe that when I look back on my undergraduate experience, I will remember this field placement and realize that I learned the most and took away the most useful knowledge from this one class experience compared to the rest of my course work. At the counseling center specifically, I was able to practice many skills including public speaking, collaboration, and professionalism. My role as outreach coordinator taught me how to put on successful events that met various student, university, or community needs. Not only this, but I was also able to act as a supervisor to another student which introduced a type of authoritative role which I was not familiar with. As for my program development role within the counseling center, I was able to practice my critical thinking skills and exercise my creativity. I had to identify a problem and then come up with a solution to solve that problem which for me was designing and implementing two different treatment programs. I had to overcome my uncertainty in my abilities trying to do something that had not been done before. This meant that I had nothing to reference and compare my efforts to throughout my process which was intimidating at times. From that uncertainty and doubt, I ended up accepting and embracing the struggle because it taught me the importance of asking for help when needed. It is okay to seek advice and guidance from others because we all have different backgrounds and experience to bring to the table that could prove beneficial to solving a problem. The best work and efforts are those that incorporate collaboration.

Since I hope to pursue a career in mental health counseling, it was great to be able to have this experience to show me how that profession and lifestyle may look. I was able to witness the inner workings of a university counseling center as well as what it is like to work in a professional office with other staff members. The JMU counseling center has set a high standard for what a happy and rewarding job can look like. I will carry that standard with me when I am looking for my own site to settle into because I now know what I value and enjoy within a work



environment. The staff is incredibly friendly and encouraging of my efforts and interests. Everyone treats each other with respect and they truly care for one another and their own well-being which is a rare sight for people in the mental health profession. I am so grateful that I was able to have this experience and really make it my own so that I felt like I made a difference and left an impact at JMU.