



# Spotswood Elementary School

## Placement Description

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Public Elementary School placement that offers practical foundational experience working with students.

## Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

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- One on one mentoring with students
- Co-leading small group counseling
- Meetings with parents and teachers
- Testing assistance

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## Contact Information

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



*Fall 2016 – Carolyn Riegel*

The school motto at Spotswood Elementary School is “Be safe, be kind, be focused.” Teachers and faculty at Spotswood put their hearts into bettering their students, and helping them live and represent Spotswood in those ways. Students come from various backgrounds, with 93% of those attending coming from families whose SES status falls below the poverty line. Many children come from refugee families; there are around 13 different languages spoken at the school. Despite all the diversity, as wonderful as it is, language barriers and financial issues are just a couple of the obstacles teachers try to tackle in order to promote a positive learning climate for their students. Over the course of time I have spent at Spotswood, I have been floored seeing the extent teachers go to in order to help their students, and to help push them in a positive direction despite all the disadvantages they face.

Some students I have gotten to know more than others while working with the school counselor, Mrs. Adamek, this semester. I have helped lead friendship and role-model lunches, which consist of bringing students together at lunch time who could learn and benefit from each other. In friendship lunches the lunch is focused around facilitating conversation and promoting friendship between select students that could use each other as friends, and helping them get to know each other. In role-model lunches, there is usually a student that counts as the leader of the group, or is considered to be the positive role model. The other students attending the lunch are typically intended to look to the role-model student as someone who sets a positive example, and to emulate their behaviors. I have also assisted with in-class guidance lessons. Much of the time lessons are taught using a story that is read, followed by a discussion and/or written activity.

Behind the scenes there is a great deal of work entailed in the job of a school counselor, and I have helped with them as much as possible as well. I have helped organize and copy various materials, attended meetings, and helped coordinate food projects and Christmas gifts for various families. Additionally, I mentored a student once a week for the majority of the semester. She was a third grader who needed some additional support in her life, and was part of the big-brothers/big-sisters program. Her usual big sister had scheduling conflicts and could not meet with her this semester, so I stepped in instead. We would eat lunch together on Fridays and over time she opened up to me about parts of her home life. I made a lot of progress with getting to know her and will miss her when I leave, but I feel like I’ve made a positive impact in her life and that feeling is incredibly worthwhile.

Of all the experiences I’ve had this semester at my field placement, I’ve enjoyed all of them and the different responsibilities I’ve undertaken, but I think what I’ve most enjoyed is that I got full-picture exposure to what it is like to be a school counselor. Mrs. Adamek had me help with various different projects, sit in in different types of meetings, observe phone calls and consultations with parents, and various therapy sessions with students. I am leaving Spotswood having my horizons broadened and my perspective widened as to how much school counselors



undertake, and how easily their schedules can change. I didn't realize how flexible you have to be as a person. To a degree I understood how important it would be to know how to roll with whatever is brought to the table, but I didn't know how many different responsibilities would be presented simultaneously, and how much mental flexibility is required to successfully maneuver through the challenges.

Something I've taken away from this semester, however, is that after seeing how much school counselors do, and being a part of discussions with other school counselors in the area, I've learned that they do not get paid enough for all that they undertake. I know in school systems there typically is not a lot of money, but in the school counselor position I learned how unfair the wages earned really are. In order to be a school counselor you have to have your master's degree at minimum, so they are all highly educated and trained professionals. They are in charge of classroom guidance lessons as well as helping students individually, weighing in on disciplinary issues in classrooms, partaking in organizing a great deal for families, sitting on various school boards, and are highly involved in other school board organizations. They are expected to go above and beyond the minimum, which is already a great deal of work. Typically, they work longer hours and have more responsibilities than people such as the mental health school social workers, and yet the social workers are paid significantly more. The discrepancy in salary is something I found to be an issue because if you are equally as qualified as someone else, and you are doing more work, I believe it is unfair that you are paid less. At minimum, the pay should be equal.

Aside from my issue with how salaries are distributed, I have a great deal of respect for school counselors, and feel like I have learned a lot from my time at the elementary school. I've learned a lot about kids, from how to talk to them about various simple issues such as conflicts between peers, to how to most appropriately discuss family issues. I've also really enjoyed being a part of guidance classroom lessons, the coordinated lunches, mentoring my "little sister" and working with a supervisor as wonderful as Mrs. Adamek. Vocationally, I'm still figuring out what I want to do. I'm fairly positive I am not interested in pursuing a career in school counseling just because it wasn't quite the right fit for me, but the work was still enjoyable. With regard to my future I may look into a career in student affairs or another area in Psychology.

### ***Fall 2015 - Jordan Skowron***

Spotswood Elementary School, located in Harrisonburg, VA is an elementary school devoted to teaching students and teaching them well. The mission at Spotswood is "Where Learning has no Limits." Though Spotswood was my site, I specifically spent my time working with the School counselor. I had the opportunity to shadow Angie Adamek, who was a "Double Duke" and has been in Harrisonburg ever sense. Through shadowing this position I saw the



many “hats” that need to be worn when being a counselor in a school of 400+ students. The services of the counselor vary daily, but mostly focus around meeting with students, teachers, parents, and administration, teaching the guidance curriculum, and being a part of committees like the Olweus Bullying Prevention Committee.

When I first began at Spotswood, I was unsure of what my experience would be like. I was unsure of my expectations and was not very prepared for helping with elementary aged students because my previous experience had been with high school aged students. I was quickly put to work and introduced to so many amazing children who were always excited to get to know me and learn why I was at the school.

Being at Spotswood for an entire semester really helped me get a grasp on what the daily routine could look like for a counselor at an elementary school. I learned so much from my supervisor. I got a lot of hands on experience with helping children with problems and conflicts, being involved in social skills groups, shadowing meetings and assisting with teaching lessons on different positive characteristics for the guidance lessons. I did a lot of administrative tasks, like filing, organizing, decorating bulletin boards and distributing materials to specific teachers. My favorite opportunity I had throughout the semester was being able to mentor specific students. I was fortunate enough to mentor a few girls in different grade levels. I would meet with each of these girls during one of their lunch times or content time once a week. I had the chance to feel like I was really making an impact in their lives by being a friendly face that they would see every week. Throughout the semester, I saw incredible growth among these students. I saw each of these girls gain more confidence in herself, become happy at school and build relationships with other students in their classrooms and with me.

I had an overall, amazing experience at Spotswood Elementary. There are many advantages to doing a field placement at Spotswood. I loved learning from my supervisor, Angie, who has been at the same school for over 15 years. I gained so much knowledge about what she does and why she does it. Angie is passionate about the students and will do anything to make sure they are safe, happy and at school to learn. I am so happy that I got to learn from someone who loves what she does.

Being a student at JMU makes it very easy to get caught up in the JMU bubble. Unless an effort is made to “pop” that bubble, there is a chance that JMU students will never truly know the people of Harrisonburg. Being at Spotswood, my eyes were opened to the true nature of Harrisonburg and the people who live here. I gained a desire to know and care for the refugee community, in addition to individuals living in poverty.

I also had the advantage of seeing different organizations impact the students of Spotswood, specifically Big Brothers Big Sisters and Rise Church. Rise Church provides food bags for certain families for the weekend, and I was able to help with the distribution of these food bags on some Fridays. One last advantage of working at Spotswood was having the



opportunity to see a lot of different areas of being a school counselor. I experienced meetings with people from the school district of Harrisonburg City Public Schools. Having different experiences with different people taught me a lot about the value of seeing the “big picture” for a school district and the students are a part of that.

I think having undergrad opportunities in the field that I want to pursue are very valuable opportunities. The only limitation that I faced was not being able to do more at my site. In order to counsel students there needs to be an amount of certification and knowledge of counseling to do things well. This limitation was sometimes frustrating but overall has given me the drive to pursue a future degree in school counseling so I will have the foundation to continue to help students. I hope to soon go to graduate school for school counseling and to also start a non-profit for students in refugee/ low-income areas to have resources to making a better life with personal development skills and leadership development skills.

Everyday I learned something new. Everyday looked completely different. School Counseling is a profession that requires a lot of flexibility and adaptability. Depending on the actions of the students, a counselor could have a really low-key day or a really intense day. I gained many skills from this experience. I learned the value of patience and how important that is when dealing with children and with adults, too. I gained the ability to uphold a positive and professional attitude when interacting with people with different personalities. I also gained skills of multi-tasking and understanding child development in underprivileged areas.

I learned more in this semester than I could have imagined. Having the opportunity to have a hands on experience as an undergrad has helped me learn where my passions truly lie. This semester has helped me filter through different career paths and helped me solidify my desire to pursue school counseling. Being at Spotswood showed me what it feels like to have a job where I feel purposeful and that I am truly making a difference and making an impact. My field placement showed me that I can be the change wherever I go to whomever I meet.