

# THRIVING ON PLACEMENT

If you are a student enrolled in a course that requires you to complete a placement, internship or some sort of practicum, then this tip sheet is designed to help you meet both the practical and emotional demands placed on you.

## Plan Your Time

- Some planning needs to happen well before you even commence a course of study. Find out the dates and duration of any placement as soon as you can in order to best accommodate the placement into your existing work, family and study schedule.
- If you have a full schedule, check early to see if placement locations are already determined, or whether you have some choice as to where you are placed.
- If there are extenuating circumstances that you believe limit where you can complete your placements (e.g. financial, family, health), make these known to your placement coordinator as soon as you can – to determine if any flexibility is permitted based on your situation.
- Check your course or degree planner for suggestions as to what units of study can or should be completed alongside a placement, or whether your placement can be completed on its own. Be realistic about how much study you can take on alongside your placement, and alongside the other commitments that you already have. Do the maths.
- When doing the maths, keep in mind that you have 168 hours in the week. Most of us sleep 56 hours, leaving 112. Your placement might require you to work a typical work-week or maybe longer (possibly 40 hours), plus private study time. Any other units of study usually involve a minimum of 10 hours each to do them justice. This is all very achievable, but will be more challenging if you are also working full-time or part-time or raising a family. Estimate how long these commitments will take when doing the maths. If everything adds to more than 168, something has to give.

## Arrange Your Finances

- Consider and plan for costs in terms of clothes, accommodation and transport. If you need to purchase a more professional wardrobe, try and do this early to avoid overspending out of desperation and aim to purchase classic and durable clothes that will hopefully be suited to both current and future placements. Ask past students or your placement coordinator about whether there is affordable accommodation for students, or whether car-pooling or public transport may be an option to cut down on petrol and parking costs.
- Give as much notice to your current employer about how much time you may need to take off from work. Check if your employment has study-leave provisions and whether your study is relevant to your employment position.
- Check out what scholarships are on offer for your profession such as this link for nursing students: <https://www.une.edu.au/about-une/faculty-of-medicine-and-health/school-of-health/study-areas/nursing/scholarships> and <https://www.une.edu.au/scholarships>

## **Prepare Your Family and Friends**

- Let those you're close to know what you need to make any placement work. Perhaps there are tasks they are prepared to take on while you attend your placement (eg walking the dog, minding children, cooking meals). Let them know that the days may be long and you will be less available and possibly sometimes stressed. It may help to explain to them why doing your placement is important to you and to your study and to encourage them to see how even helping out in little ways during this time will make a big difference to you.
- If you can't take your family with you, see your placement as a chance to have some family free time, but share with your family how things are going for you. Keep in touch with family and friends and schedule some visits prior to leaving.
- If you have to bring family with you (e.g. you are single parenting), check out what childcare provisions there are in the placement area. You might be eligible for JET Child Care assistance via Centrelink

## **Do Your Homework before You Begin**

- Identify the learning goals that you are expected to meet on placement, but also those that you have set yourself. Find out if your own goals are realistic and are able to be met at your placement site. Check with your placement coordinator whether he or she is the person to approach for this information, or whether you are encouraged to contact placement sites directly.
- Once you know where you may be placed, be guided by your placement coordinator about how and where to get placement info (e.g. websites, specific contact people). Also learn about the location, whether you can do a daily commute or need accommodation in the area.
- For placements far from home, make time to explore where you are and be a bit of a tourist. Look out for the local Visitor Information Centre in the area.

## **Be Aware of Your Emotions while on Placement**

- One of the biggest traps for students doing a placement is to expect too much from yourself. This can lead you to feel like you are under-performing or even that you're not cut out for your chosen profession. The expectation on you is that you perform as well as a student on a placement. You are expected to have a reasonable amount of knowledge but obviously you cannot be as competent as someone who has been qualified and working for several years. Accept this from the outset. Conversely, you are expected to have some knowledge and skills and the expectation is that you practice these skills – even if you are not completely comfortable with them yet.
- Expect that you will make mistakes. This is part of the learning process and is to be expected. Don't beat yourself up because you slipped up in a few areas.

## **Consider how to get the Best out of Supervision**

- It's important to communicate honestly and professionally with your supervisor. If you are experiencing anxiety about your performance then this is something that your supervisor needs to know and he or she may be able to provide reassurance or some tips to help you feel more comfortable. Your supervisor is not just there to pass judgment on your performance but to offer you support and guidance.

**The support you need to succeed**

- Be wary of blaming your supervisor for your own feelings of discomfort. It is not possible for a supervisor to take away all the anxiety that you are experiencing. We can all blame others when we feel judged or inadequate but try and avoid doing so in this situation as it may sour the overall experience for you and may mask the issues in your practice that you need to take ownership for.
- Ask your supervisor questions. Often we can think that our supervisor will expect us to know everything and we don't want to appear ignorant. This is not the case. Ask him or her questions not only about your own practice but about theirs as well. Remember they are potentially a wonderful practical resource and it's your responsibility to maximise how much benefit you draw from this resource.
- Accept that sometimes your supervisor will give you critical feedback. This is part of their role. It can be difficult to hear criticism, but try and see that such feedback does not constitute a personal attack. Accept the feedback with grace and try not to make too many excuses or justifications. See it as a chance to learn. If you are unsure how to improve then politely seek clarification or some practical suggestions.

### Manage Stress

- Placement can be a stressful undertaking. It's important that you find ways to help manage this stress and to not become overwhelmed. One of the best ways to do this is to minimise the things you need to do while on prac. If possible, try and complete assignments prior to undertaking your prac. Also try and be either ahead or at least up to date with all your coursework before you begin.
- Prior to beginning a prac, make a list of strategies that can typically help you unwind. This may seem silly, but when we get stressed we can forget to do these, or perceive that we are too busy for them. Even a half hour of your favourite TV episode or walk in the sun can help you feel calmer and get perspective.
- Delegate and prioritise. Postpone non-essential tasks and ask for help from friends or loved ones. In some cases, a unit coordinator may be able to show leniency with a due date, so consider asking for more time in an assessment if you get really stuck.
- Check out the resources on stress management and relaxation on the UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Service's (CAPS) website: <http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/student-support/counselling/tip-sheets>
- You can access CAPS via telephone if you want more personalised help. To make an appointment call 02 6773 2897.

### Manage Feelings of Isolation

- When we have to leave the comfort of family and friends, or even just when we're new in a situation we can often feel lonely and like we don't belong. If you are feeling like this, then try and remember that your placement is temporary and that before you know it you will be back with those who you are comfortable with.
- Avoid the trap of just going from your placement to your accommodation. Check out the lie of the land and have fun!
- Also look at the placement guide and/or guidelines that relate to your studies at UNE. For example, for teaching: <https://www.une.edu.au/about-une/faculty-of-humanities-arts-social-sciences-and-education/school-of-education/office-for-professional-learning/future-students/professional-experience-placement-guide> or for nursing: <https://www.une.edu.au/about-une/faculty-of-medicine-and-health/school-of-health/study-areas/nursing/clinical-placements/pre-placement-requirements>

For further information contact UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Services:  
 Phone: 02 6773 2897 for an appointment; Email: [studentcounselling@une.edu.au](mailto:studentcounselling@une.edu.au) or via [AskUNE](http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/student-support/counselling)  
<http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/student-support/counselling>

**The support you need to succeed**