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## COVER LETTER GUIDELINES

When applying for practicum positions, your cover letter will serve several purposes. It will introduce you, summarize your experiences, explain your interest in a given training program, and provide the site with a sense of why you see yourself as a good fit. Although it is important to construct a strong cover letter, you do not want to spend an inordinate amount of time individually-tailoring each of your cover letters. It is recommended that you spend as much time proofreading and editing your cover letters as you do writing them. Misspellings, typos, or failure to change either the contact person's name or the name of the organization all need to be avoided.

### **Four Paragraph Structure**

Your cover letter should consist of four paragraphs and should not exceed one page. If it is more than a page, you are trying to include too much information in the cover letter. Cover letters that are too long or densely written are not likely to be read. It is also important to use the cover letter to highlight aspects of your experiences in ways that may not be possible on your resume. That is to say, please do not simply repeat text from your resume in your cover letter.

#### **Paragraph 1:**

Introduce who you are (e.g., student in the Counseling Department at William James College, etc.) and state the reason you are writing (e.g., "I am interested in pursuing a practicum placement at your facility, etc.). I would recommend referring to a "practicum" position, rather than an "internship" position, in your cover letter. The length of this paragraph is usually two to three sentences.

#### **Paragraph 2:**

Describe your qualifications and experience. Focus on aspects of your background that are most relevant for the position. This is best accomplished through brief examples that quantify your accomplishments. For example, rather than describing yourself as "mature, professional, and hardworking," illustrate these qualities by discussing your past experience as a camp counselor and the way in which you effectively managed a difficult child in collaboration with the child's parents and other staff members. Sites understand that many incoming students have little, if any, traditional clinical experience. Accordingly, it is important to discuss your relevant experiences that may not be "clinical" per se, while demonstrating your maturity and ability to be flexible.

#### **Paragraph 3:**

Develop a relationship between you and the facility to which you are applying. Explain why you are a good fit for the position (e.g. describe your prior experience/skills and your interest in the population). Use your research of the organization to demonstrate that you are speaking from direct knowledge. If there are particular aspects of the training program or organization that are appealing to you, state that explicitly. For example, given past experience as a camp counselor, you might state your interest in a practicum in a therapeutic day school. You could describe your interest in building

on your past experience and having opportunities to address a given student's social, emotional, and/or behavioral difficulties by working directly with the child in group therapy, shadowing the school's art therapist, and consulting with teachers to understand the impact of the child's difficulties in the classroom.

**Note:** Until you have spoken with Dr. Napolitano about your specific interests and he has provided you with information about different training programs, this paragraph may be more challenging to write. However, you could include some general statements about your interest in working with members of different populations or groups (e.g., children, adolescents, adults). Try to also think about and discuss general skills that you have which would benefit your work across a variety of training programs and populations (e.g., reflective listening, unbiased support, problem-solving skills, etc.). The more specific you can be about your skills and abilities, the better able you will be to demonstrate that you are a qualified candidate.

#### **Paragraph 4:**

Close with confidence, and an enthusiastic statement of your interest in the position and in meeting with the reader. Suggest a meeting time, invite further action by the reader, or indicate how you will follow up. For example, you might say "Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be delighted to speak with you further about my background and areas of interest. I will follow up within the next two weeks to see if we can find a mutually acceptable time to meet."

#### **Final Points**

- You may include your cover letter in the body of the email to the contact person or attach it. If you attach it, please write something very brief in the body of the email. For example, you might say, "Dear Ms. Peters, I have attached my cover letter, resume, and letters of recommendation in application for a practicum position at the Academy of Physical and Social Development. Thank you for your time and consideration. Sincerely, Joseph Smith."
- Include your name, address, phone number, and email address (WJC account) at the top of the page.
- Include the name and the title of the person to whom the letter is addressed. If the contact person has a master's degree (e.g., M.A., M.S., M.S.W.) and/or one of the following credentials (e.g., LMHC, LICSW, LMFT), then you should refer to him or her as "Mr." or "Ms.," respectively. If the contact person has a doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., Psy.D., M.D.), then you should refer to the individual as "Dr."

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March 15, 2017

Ann O'Donnell, LICSW  
John C. Corrigan Mental Health Center  
49 Hillside Street  
Fall River, MA 02720

Dear Ms. O'Donnell:

As an entering student in the Counseling Department at William James College (formerly Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology), I am seeking a first-year practicum placement for the 2017-2018 academic year.

With over two years of clinical experience as a Rehabilitation Specialist working with adults with mental health and substance abuse issues, I would bring...to the John C. Corrigan Mental Health Center. My additional experiences as a Resident Advisor at Hamilton College afforded me the opportunity to... *(Note: Describe your experiences in a manner that illustrates the strengths and attributes you would bring to the position at the John C. Corrigan Mental Health Center. Be mindful of the mission of each site to which you are applying and use examples to illustrate skills/abilities that each site would be interested in.)*

Given my strong interest in working with adults, I would be especially interested in providing clinical services under supervision at John C. Corrigan Mental Health Center because... *(Note: Describe your reasons for applying to each site, relevant skills that would benefit your work at the site, noting how you think the experience would enable you to build on your past experiences and afford you opportunities to develop, for example, assessment and intervention skills.)*

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be delighted to speak with you further about my background and areas of interest. A copy of my resume and letters of recommendation are attached. *(Note: If you live outside the metropolitan Boston area, please suggest two to three days when you could be in the Boston area within two to three weeks of sending your cover letter, resume, and letters of recommendation.)*

Sincerely,

Rhonda Smith