



# 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

## Contact Information

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



### *Fall 2019- Issabelle Rice*

The mission statement of Spotswood elementary is “At Spotswood Elementary School we believe in fostering an environment in which students, staff and families are nurtured, educated and inspired.” At this elementary school there are many services provided. Some of the services are to students such as: individual counseling, group counseling, and classroom guidance lessons. Some of these services are for teachers and other staff, such as: consultations, and school event coordination. There are even services that are for parents such as: referrals to outside services and food aid for families. These services required a variety of skills and understanding so I was able to learn a lot by being involved with so many things.

At this site I had the opportunity to participate and lead group sessions on friendship skills. During my field placement I was a part of 3 different lunch groups. I met with a fourth-grade girl group, a fifth-grade girl group and a fourth-grade boy group. These students voluntarily signed up for participation in these groups to receive help in making friends. I also had the opportunity of using office machinery such as a copier and printer as well as a die cutting machine. The practice and efficiency I gained with this technology can be useful in a variety of settings. Additionally, I shadowed individual counseling sessions and guidance lessons. I was able to really learn how to communicate with children in a way where they can still learn. Before field placement I had very little to no experience with kids so being able to observe situations and how my supervisor was able to handle it helped me gain a lot of knowledge in that area. I had the opportunity to make an official observation for two students’ child study cases. By collecting objective data on students, Spotswood’s mental health staff was able to go forward, and begin building a case for each of these children to receive special education accommodations. For my contribution project, I created new material for a fourth-grade guidance lesson plan. This lesson was a previously used but had many issues with participation and efficiency. By adding new activities and finding better material the lesson can be more efficient while still maintaining participation.

Working at a school is limited in a way because there are many time constraints as well as constraints on what tasks you can complete without supervision or explicit instructions. Schools are very regulated sites, what you wear and how you speak matters because you will work with very impressionable kids. However, if you plan to work with a school population it is important that you value this as an opportunity to gain practice in these areas. One of the hardest parts of working in this kind of environment is that other school leaders will determine what tasks are prioritized. This means that although you may be more interested in meeting with a new student, printing a parent newsletter for each student to take home may be the focus for the day. Tasks like these are simply a part of being in the school counselor field and having the flexibility and the organization to still maintain tasks you want to do is up to your ability. Another difficult task is having to make your own priorities. Although you may have many tasks you wish to complete in a day you have to be realistic and prioritize. This could mean that for one day all you



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were able to complete is two guidance lessons and help two teachers with students in crisis. It might not be as satisfying as completing a long-bulleted list of many tasks; however, these tasks are just as important and seeing the change in students can be very gratifying.

I learned an incredible amount by spending my time at this site. Spotswood itself is an incredibly diverse school, with students from many backgrounds and strengths. This requires the school counselor to have a flexible role to accomplish many tasks daily; through this experience I too learned this flexibility. I also learned that kids have different needs and understandings at different age levels. Working at a site where you can not only watch that development happen but be a part of it is an incredible opportunity. I learned that kids are not only capable of learning techniques to self-regulate but also know they can ask others for help when they feel like they are unable to help themselves. Spotswood gives students opportunities to help themselves in many adaptive ways within the classroom and beyond. This opportunity, I believe, creates a more adaptive foundation for students to use throughout their lives. I also learned that in a school setting going the extra mile is often worthwhile. Helping a child tie their shoe can change their attitude for a whole day. Something else I learned is that organization is a valued skill. My willingness and ability to organize spaces in the school allowed me the ability have an impact on the school in a few different ways, from creating a needs inventory, to saving valuable time for anyone whole is looking for those supplies. Lastly, I learned that observation and insight are most powerful when used together. Observation at a teacher's level may be concerning, but by providing insight to that child's progress from years prior, a deeper more meaningful understanding is possible.

I decided that I wanted a career in school counseling at the elementary school level because of the amazing experience I had with not only this site but also my supervisor Angie Adamek. In an elementary school kids frequently model the actions and words of the people around them. Mrs. Adamek reflects this knowledge with kindness and openness that kids in every grade show her in return. Mrs. Adamek is also in incredibly hard worker with many responsibilities and programs in which she is a key piece. In addition to this hard work she also goes above and beyond her daily list of to-dos, so students feel acknowledged and that their concerns matter. Working with someone who cares so much about others and still finds the time to get so many duties accomplished daily is inspiring.

***Spring 2019 – Camille Spain (Intro Field Work)***

My fieldwork site was Spotswood Elementary School, an elementary school in Harrisonburg City Public Schools. Spotswood serves children in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The mission statement of the school is: "At Spotswood Elementary School we believe in fostering an environment in which students, staff and families are nurtured, educated and inspired". My supervisor for the site was Angie Adamek, the school guidance counselor. The duties of the guidance counselor at Spotswood include classroom guidance, individual



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counseling, small group counseling, and various administrative duties. My supervisor was the only guidance counselor for over 400 students.

At the site I was able to assist with classroom guidance, small group guidance, Student of the Week activities, and assemblies. I was also able to attend two professional development days and a meeting about the McKinney Vento Homelessness Act. I preferred to observe individual guidance instead of providing counseling.

For classroom guidance I helped keep students' focus during the lessons and assisted with activities that involved writing or role-playing. For small group guidance, I assisted Ms. Adamek in leading group discussions. The topic of our small group for the semester was grief and I was able to get the students to talk about some of the experiences and emotions they were feeling when their loved one passed away.

For Student of the Week activities, I helped create the new bulletin board every week for the new value of the week, e.g. kindness, responsibility, perseverance. I also assisted in 5th grade transition to middle school. I made English and Spanish photocopies of middle school class selection forms as well as other guidance announcements for middle school and Family Life Education.

I loved working at the site and I think it was a great fit for me. My favorite part was being able to work with children with a staff that so obviously cared deeply about the well-being of their students. I also liked that I was able to work with such a diversity of students. Spotswood was nothing like the peer group that I grew up with so it was a learning experience for me being able to work with students who have just immigrated to the country and/or English is their second language. It was also nice to see that the students were so enthusiastic about individual and small-group guidance meetings. In fact, many students sought out meetings with my supervisor simply because they liked her and playing with the toys in her office, which was not what I was expecting. I was expecting students to have reservations about coming into the office for guidance.

One thing that was challenging for me was managing behavior for a whole classroom for classroom guidance. I wanted to maintain a positive relationship with the students so they would feel comfortable around me, but during library/guidance time some would not want to pay attention and would distract their classmates from focusing on important lessons. I was not sure how much I should intervene and how much I should just ignore behavior for the sake of the other students.

I learned from this experience that I do want to work with children in my future career. I think that teaching them skills early is vital to their behavior later in life. I think that my strengths lie in working with individuals and small groups, however. I also would prefer to work with people with mental illness, as I realized that school guidance counselors typically do not help those students with their mental illness and that is something that I am interested in doing. I still am pursuing becoming a counselor or therapist in the future but I think I would prefer to work in the private sector so I would not have to spread myself over so many children and would be able to focus more intently on a few clients.



As a whole, I think that I am the type of person to listen and think before I speak. Although it could be beneficial depending on the type of client I am serving, I think my field experience helped me to open up and improved my ability to ask questions. It is a skill I am still improving but I think that with practice I can become more extraverted where it is helpful.

### *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.



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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



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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.